

Prisse d'Avennes

Islamic Art in Cairo

With an introduction by
George T. Scanlon

"France perfected the art of the *dessinateur* in the early 19th century, relating it to the newer crafts of lithography, colored printing from metal or stone plates, and eventually photography. This art can be relished in the thousands of drawings assembled in the *Description d'Egypte*, Napoleon's eternal gift to the civilization of the Nile Valley. Emile Prisse d'Avennes was the contingent heir of this legacy; indeed he may be deemed its pinnacle in that color reproduction often enhanced his purely linear talents. It would be a courageous Egyptologist at the very end of the twentieth century who would eschew the use of the two volumes of illustrations in his *Atlas de l'art Egyptien* because many are of buildings or decoration which have disappeared. The very same reasons obtain for his equally monumental *L'art arabe d'après les monuments du Kaire*, in three volumes, the subject of this new updated edition.

"There can be little doubt that Prisse's strength and reputation as a *dessinateur* were based on his thorough training as architect-engineer-surveyor (in this sense his modern congeners would be Lutyens and Wright, whose drawings and sketches have become collectables) and his strength of personality, the almost total subjection of his life to his work. This latter facet is almost brutally suggested in the face painted in 1844 by Deveria. The determination to achieve his two-fold objective of recording the Pharaonic and Islamic legacies of Egypt is apparent in the visage. The parallel dedication toward publication of the immense body of materials is equally apparent in the dates of the publication of his masterworks: the *Atlas* was published serially between 1858 and 1877, *L'art arabe* between 1867 and 1879."

—George T. Scanlon



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E. Prisse d'Avennes

Islamic Art in Cairo

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Islamic Art in Cairo

from the 7th to the 18th centuries

Introduction by

George T. Scanlon

Captions by

Yasmeen Siddiqui

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INTRODUCTION

by George T. Scanlon

France perfected the art of the *dessinateur* in the early 19th century, relating it to the newer crafts of lithography, colored printing from metal or stone plates, and eventually photography. This art can be relished in the thousands of drawings assembled in the *Description d'Egypte*, Napoleon's eternal gift to the civilization of the Nile Valley. Emile Prisse d'Avenues was the contingent heir of this legacy; indeed he may be deemed its pinnacle in that color reproduction often enhanced his purely linear talents. It would be a courageous Egyptologist at the very end of the twentieth century who would eschew the use of the two volumes of illustrations in his *Atlas de l'art Egyptien* because many are of buildings or decoration which have disappeared. The very same reasons obtain for his equally monumental *L'art arabe d'après les monuments du Kaire*, in three volumes, the subject of this new updated edition.

There can be little doubt that Prisse's strength and reputation as a *dessinateur* were based on his thorough training as architect-engineer-surveyor (in this sense his modern congeners would be Lutyens and Wright, whose drawings and sketches have become collectables) and his strength of personality, the almost total subjection of his life to his work. This latter facet is almost brutally suggested in the face painted in 1844 by Deveria. The determination to achieve his two-fold objective of recording the Pharaonic and Islamic legacies of Egypt is apparent in the visage. The parallel dedication toward publication of the immense body of materials is equally apparent in the dates of the publication of his masterworks: the *Atlas* was published serially between 1858 and 1877, *L'art arabe* between 1867 and 1879. An earlier volume of character sketching appeared in London in 1848 as an *Oriental Album*, whose drawings have appealed to social historians and art historians of nineteenth-century Egypt until the present day. And beyond all these are the finished drawings and etchings, the sketches and notes, memorabilia and correspondence which comprise the Prisse d'Avenues archive in the Bibliothèque National in Paris. (For all his valor and dedication, Prisse was not above a corrosive commentary on contemporary Frenchmen in Egypt and his viceroyal patrons, as well as giving a savor of a repressed libido: his *Petite memoires secrètes* saw the light of print in Paris in 1930.)

He arrived in Egypt in 1827 and worked under the patronage of Muhammad Ali and his heir apparent, Ibrahim Pasha, at various tasks related to his architectural and engineering skills and was at one time the official tutor to the royal children. During this period he was seized by the idea of recording the architectural and artistic legacy of Egypt from the earliest period to right before that of an unsympathetic (to the past)

eupptic modernization. In 1839 he took off for Luxor as his base of operations (indeed he lived in the back rooms of an incompletely excavated temple), making recording forays throughout Upper Egypt and into Nubia and the Eastern Desert, a by-product being the splendid drawings of the *Oriental Album*. By 1843 he believed he had enough data to contemplate publication, and returned to Europe. There was evidence of no small pride in having amended and added to the immense recording of the *dessinateurs* of the *Description*. We, his debtors, should also note that he had but two assistants as compared to the numbers of experts deployed by Napoleon.

But he was still unsatisfied with his trove. Some of his drawings needed a refinement of detail, others evidenced the need for a fresh approach, still others dictated a survey of monuments requiring inclusion if the ones he had drawn were to yield their incontrovertible value and uniqueness. He knew, too, that with the appointment of Mariette as head of the new Egyptian Museum and director of the powerful Antiquities Service a new rigor had enspirited archaeology and recording. He returned to Cairo in 1858 and managed to fit himself into this new world of permits and reports. He devoted the first year to the Islamic monuments and the next year and a half to Upper Egypt and Nubia. In less primitive conditions than obtained in the earlier period, he corrected his previous work and recorded pertinent aspects of what had been uncovered in the interval. And this time he included a photographer in his team so as to gauge better the degree of correction necessary for a more perfect publication. Without being fully aware of the effect, Prisse commenced the evolution of the extinction of the *dessinateur*.

L'art arabe is the perfect pendant to those sections of the *Description* devoted to the Islamic art and architecture of Egypt. Its 200 plates, when conjoined to their parallel pictorial treatment in the *Description*, exert a powerful effect on the reader and scholar. If Art, in the noumenal sense, is the depiction of, then collection of, details so as to create a sense of tradition then these volumes are a visual celebration of such Art. When coupled with a volume like Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament* they become witnesses to the omnivorous appetite for the older traditions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They provide the 'inner life' to the pictorial records of such Orientalist artists as David Roberts, Lord Leighton, and John Frederick Lewis in that they, the *dessinateurs*, recapitulate more exactly what was demonstrable to the reader and scholar and artist and architect in the painted scene, correcting what was imprecise or merely 'impressionistic' in the oil or watercolor. Without them, there could have been no 'Oriental Rococo,' 'Saracenic Eclectic,' or the motley trends of Ottoman and/or Mughal imitations. With them in hand, the decorator did not have to travel to trawl themes. Men as different as Fortuny and Oscar Wilde were utterly charmed by them.

Is there a demand for a new edition? By scholars and students of Islamic art and architecture, yes. It was admitted by his contemporaries and assistants that Prisse spoke Arabic far better than most of the expatriates

in Cairo. (In addition, he had no trouble going anywhere in Egypt as he dressed in the style of an Egyptian Turk and called himself 'Idriss Effendi,' a close approximation of his name.) Nevertheless he made a fair number of mistakes in his transliterations and was probably misled by the locals as to names and dates attributed to various monuments. These have been corrected as nearly as possible in this edition (do not forget that some of the monuments have been destroyed) with a proper correlation of plate number and correct historical data. The subjects are now intelligently identified with reasonable subscriptions. If any errors attend after such perspicuity, they are a very small price to pay for the accuracy and variety of the drawings. (For instance, the many drawings of the eaves and side attachments of lambrequins or of stone dome decoration attest to his art historical sense of development and variation.)

One aspect of his endeavors remains paramount to this day: his drawings and notes about buildings that have disappeared. Creswell depended on him for his own assays of the development of architectural and decorative principles. One need only cite the excellent portrayal of a stone doorway in the palace of the Ayyubid sultan, Najm al-Din Malik al-Salih, on Roda Island (Pl. I), which has now gone. The incipient molded bull's eye is sketched in the stone around the rectangular window. This is forty years before the fulfillment of the 'idea' in the buildings of the Qalawaun period. And the waxy-leaved capitals of the engaged colonettes forming the sides of the portal point toward the 'lotus' capitals of the fifteenth century (e. g., the capitals of the Maqaad of Mamay of 1496). One looks, too, at the ground plan of the Mosque of Malika Safiya (Pl. II and wrongly ascribed to a sixteenth-century Ottoman governor, Da'ud Pasha) and one wonders if it did have an octagonal fountain in the courtyard and if there were three grand sets of rounded steps originally. Or one looks at Pl. XVIII (tomb complex of Abdallah al-Manufi, who died in 1348): today only the sky-lighted dome remains. Because of Prisse we know there was a second dome and a liwan to the complex and the remains of a separate domed mausoleum slightly to the south with a set of three lights above a keel-arched mihrab similar to those in the aforementioned liwan.

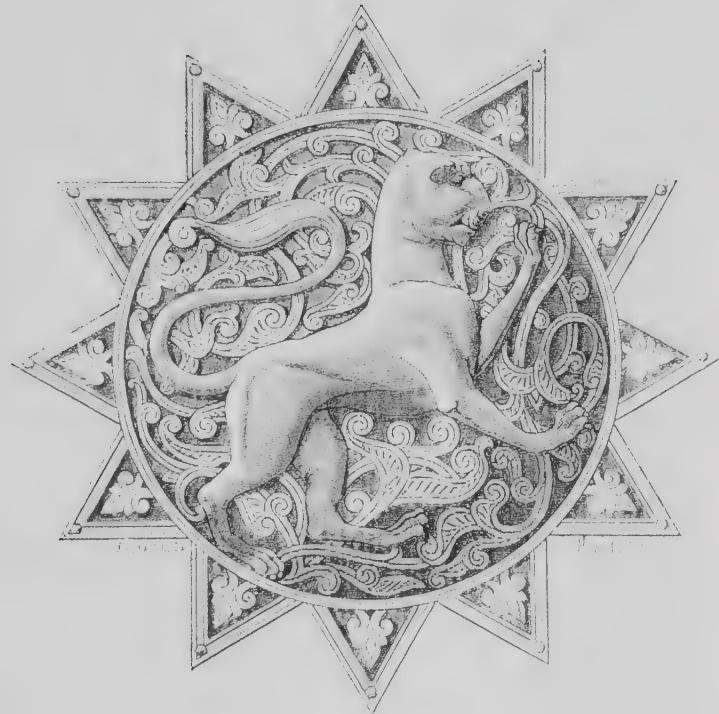
For the present-day reader and/or scholar, one major problem remains to be faced with Prisse's work on the score of the Islamic art and architecture of Cairo: why so much extraneous material? Why are we given drawings of Andalusian textiles (some misdated into the bargain)? Why an Ottoman quiver and bow case of appliquéd leather? Or a piece of paper appliquéd design of the late Mughal period? There are seven plates devoted to the minbar at Qus and still others to the later minibars of al-Salih Tala'i and Qaysun while there are precious few examples of Mamluke ceramics and enameled glass. And it is difficult to explain his comparative obsession with the decoration of the Burdayni Mosque, unless it was easier of access than other monuments. One wonders about the ten plates devoted to an eighteenth-century Maghribi Quran; was he under obligation

to the Cairene shaykh who owned it? Since all of these drawings are of superior quality and have proven useful to scholars working outside the distinct field of Egyptian Islamic art, would it be better to have excluded them? If Prisse understood these as contributing to his two broad fields of endeavor, Egyptian Islamic architecture and architectural decoration, he left the relationships unexplained. And one must not forget that a *dessinateur* was determined to get the bulk of his material into print notwithstanding our modern niceties of categorization.

And publishers could and did add graphic work from other hands to enhance what they thought was the 'picturesque' quality of a work. Prisse found this out when he looked at the narrative sections (provided by the Egyptologist James Augustus St. John) of the *Oriental Album* of 1848: therein Pl. 25 ('Nubian Females') is followed in the text by an etching 'Minar at Natens,' which is of the complex at Natanz in Iran; and Pl. 28 ('Abyssinian Priest and Warrior') by an etching of 'Pavilion near Kashan!' Thus, if the aforementioned reader and scholar is also interested in Iranian Islamic art and architecture, would they be better served if the etchings were excised?

Enfin, Prisse was perhaps not well served by the publishing norms of his own day or by his manic drive to get his work before the public. Other imperfections have been noted above, some of which have been corrected or made more felicitous in this edition.

Nevertheless, in bulk this was an impressive body of work, of such scope and quality that we still turn to it today as much to resolve lacunae occasioned by what has been lost in the interval as to admire its professional quality. At some point in the very near future Emile Prisse d'Avennes will be 'scanned' and rendered into a quotidian CD-Rom; in the meantime let us look once more at a supreme *dessinateur* at work and for those passionate about the Islamic legacy of Egypt—may they admire and stand grateful.



THE PLATES



Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun, interior of the maqsura, 9th century

Gypsum and ash pillars accentuate the domed mihrab. The mosque, inspired by the great mosque of Samarra in the patron's homeland, accommodated a burgeoning population of troops. The decaying ornament in the arch's soffit no longer exists.

Prostrating men provide scale and accentuate the arcade's massiveness.
Arches vary little; they rest on brick pillars with a rectangular plan.
Unobstructed interior windows and laced exterior windows form interesting contrasts, capturing the movement of air and light.



Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun, arcade and interior windows, 9th century



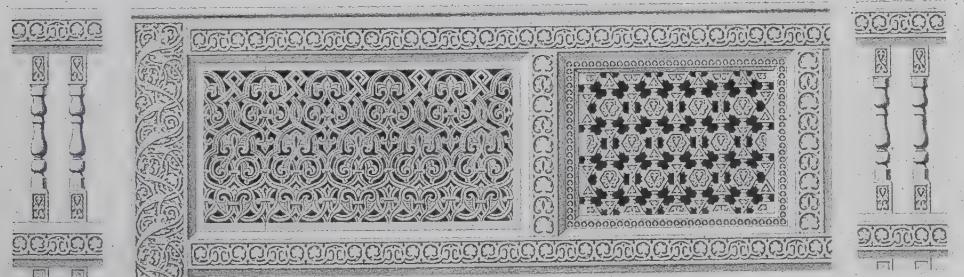
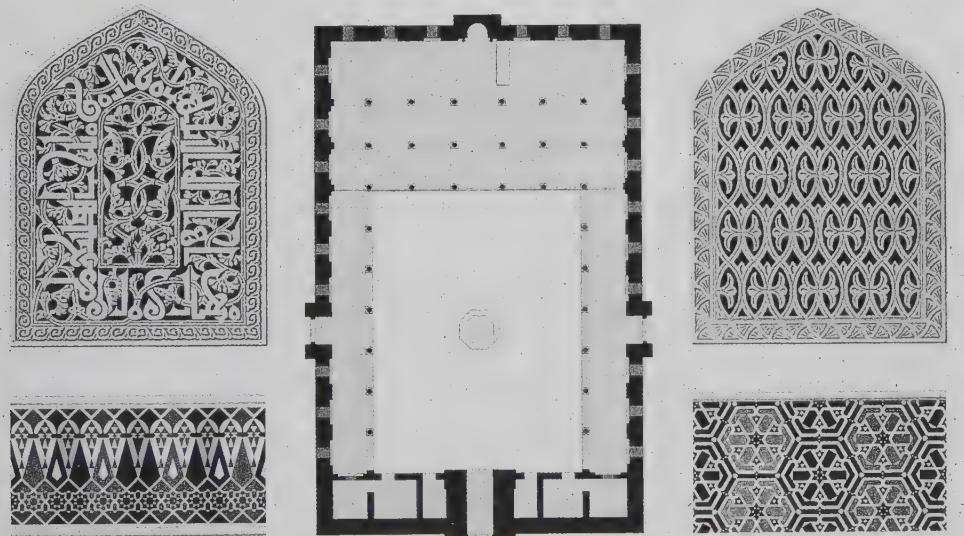
Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun, details, 9th century

Prisse contrasts the interior arched spandrels with the decorated arches of the courtyard, which display a broad frieze of stucco rosettes. Stucco-work frames the windows distributed around the whole building. According to Prisse, these helped disburse fragrances of ambergris into the congregation.

Students congregate around columns, highlighting the mosque's function. Prisse's focus on the structure as one adjusted and renovated through various epochs provides insight into the evolution of Cairo and the position of theological, scholarly activity in the cityscape.



Al-Azhar mosque, main courtyard, 10th–18th centuries



Tala'i Abu Reziq mosque, elevation and details, 12th century

Little beyond Prisse's details, elevation, and plan have survived except "the planks [on which Imam Husayn's body was bathed] embedded above the middle arch of the maqsura [traditionally engraved and ornamented], which have never borne inscriptions."

Radwan Katkhuda's 18th-century addition to the Citadel provided a stage for the decisive event orchestrated under the pretense of a feast in 1811. Muhammad Ali Pasha invited all the Mamlukes (elite slave-soldiers) in Egypt to the fortress and had them massacred.



Bab al-Azab, main gate of the Citadel, 18th century

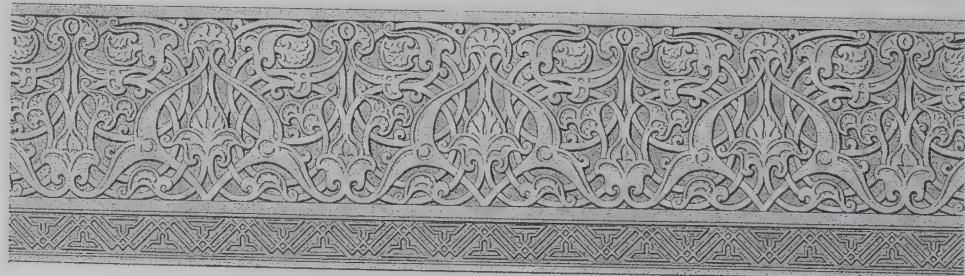
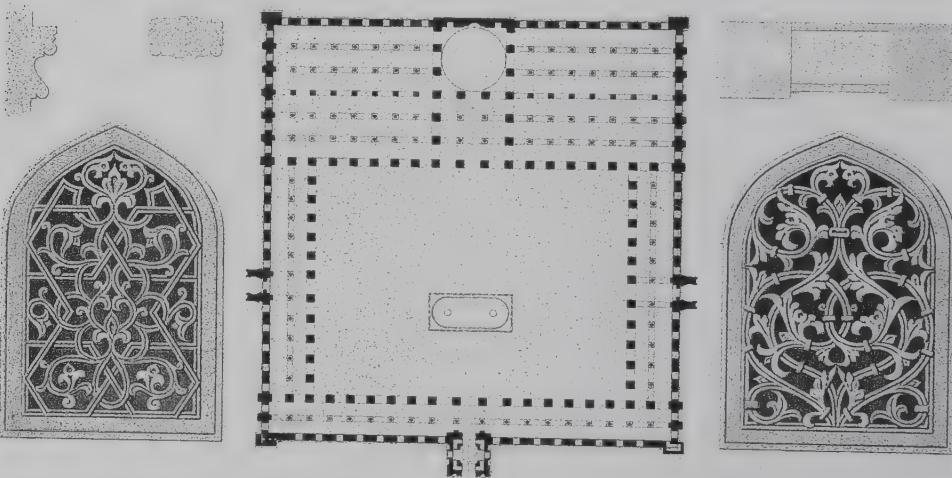


Entrance to the palace of Sultan Baybars, 13th century

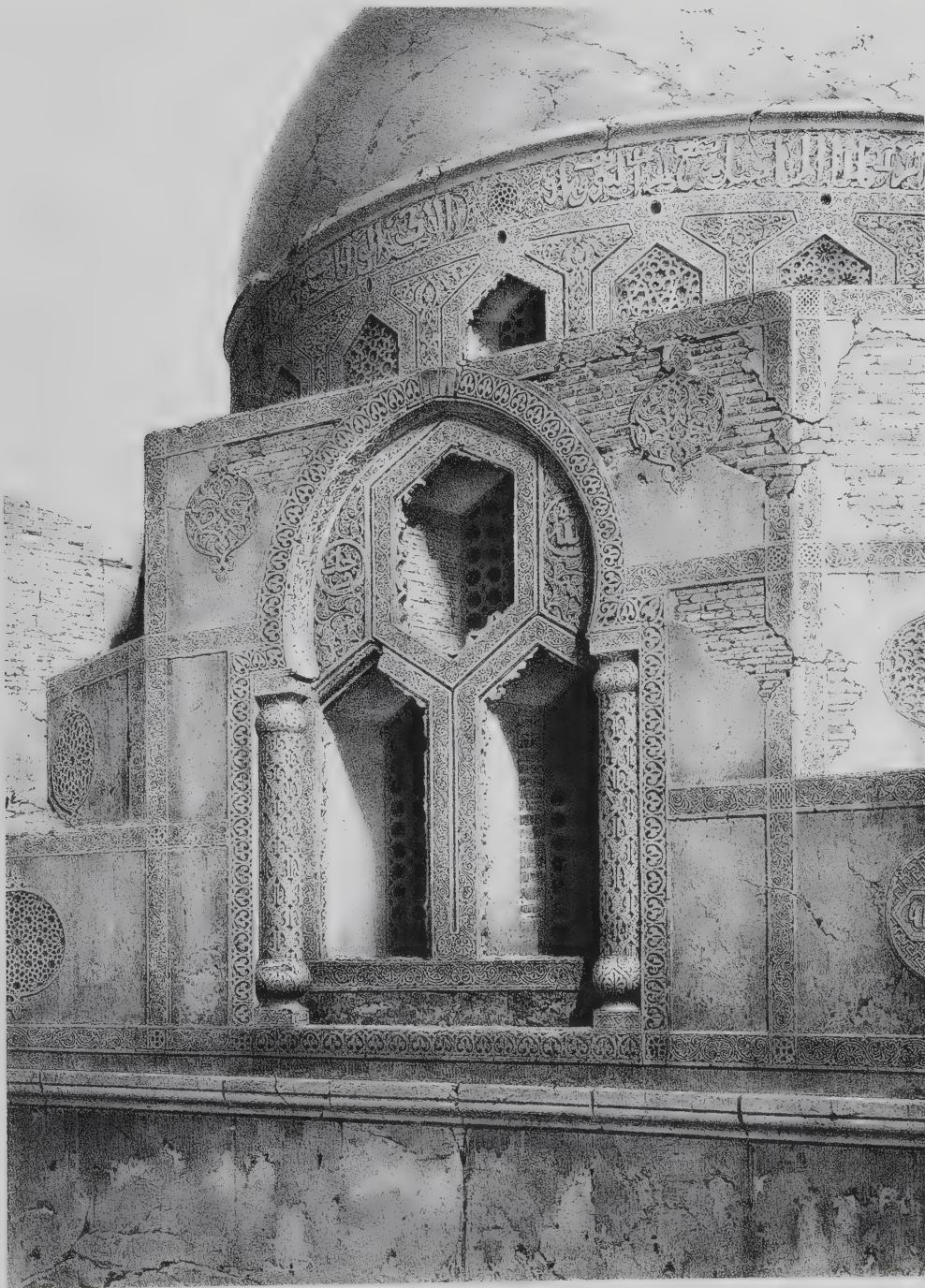
Prisse intended to convey the nature of princely dwellings in this period when peace was fragile and the state apparatus vulnerable to sedition. The palace's position between the citadel and the city provided a strategic buffer.



Although the mosque was already in ruins by the time of Napoleon's expedition, Prisse, inspired by the remnants, proposed layout schemes and parallels the fine decoration with that of its contemporary, Granada's Alhambra.



Al-Zahir mosque, plan, elevation, & details, 13th century



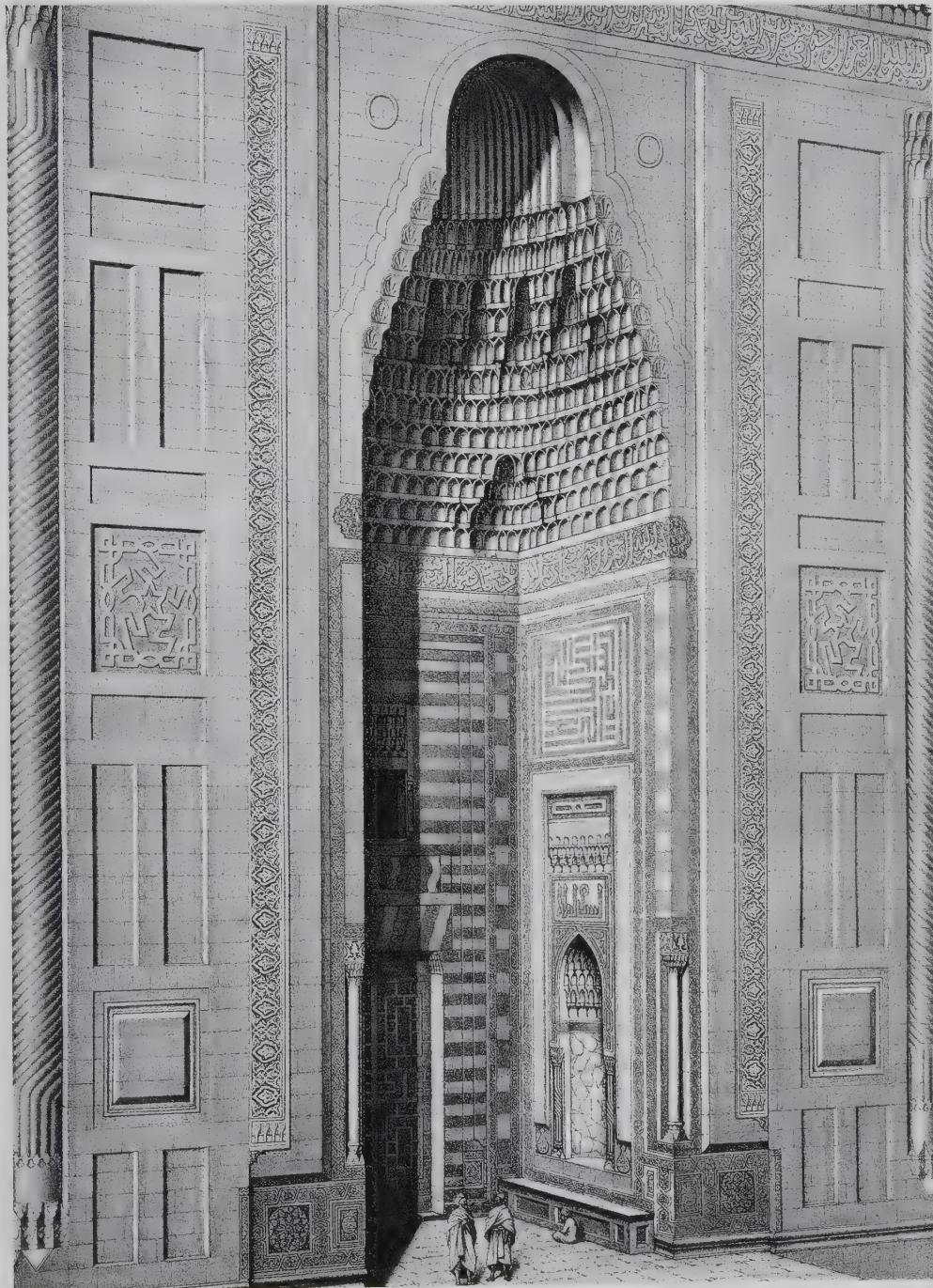
Tekiyat al-Shaykh Hasan Sadaqa, 16th century

Sultan Selim added the 16th-century tekiya to a 14th-century mosque to house Mawali Sufis. The structure's silhouette is delineated by the dome, which rests on a cubical base. The large circular interior was used by whirling dervishes.

The mosque, patronized by a former slave of Qalawaun, is the oldest standing khanqa in Cairo. Its minaret once towered over surrounding structures. The complex's waqf document has survived and offers insights into the daily life of 14th-century Sufis.



Baybarsiya mosque, minaret, 14th century



Mosque of Sultan Hasan, portal, 14th century

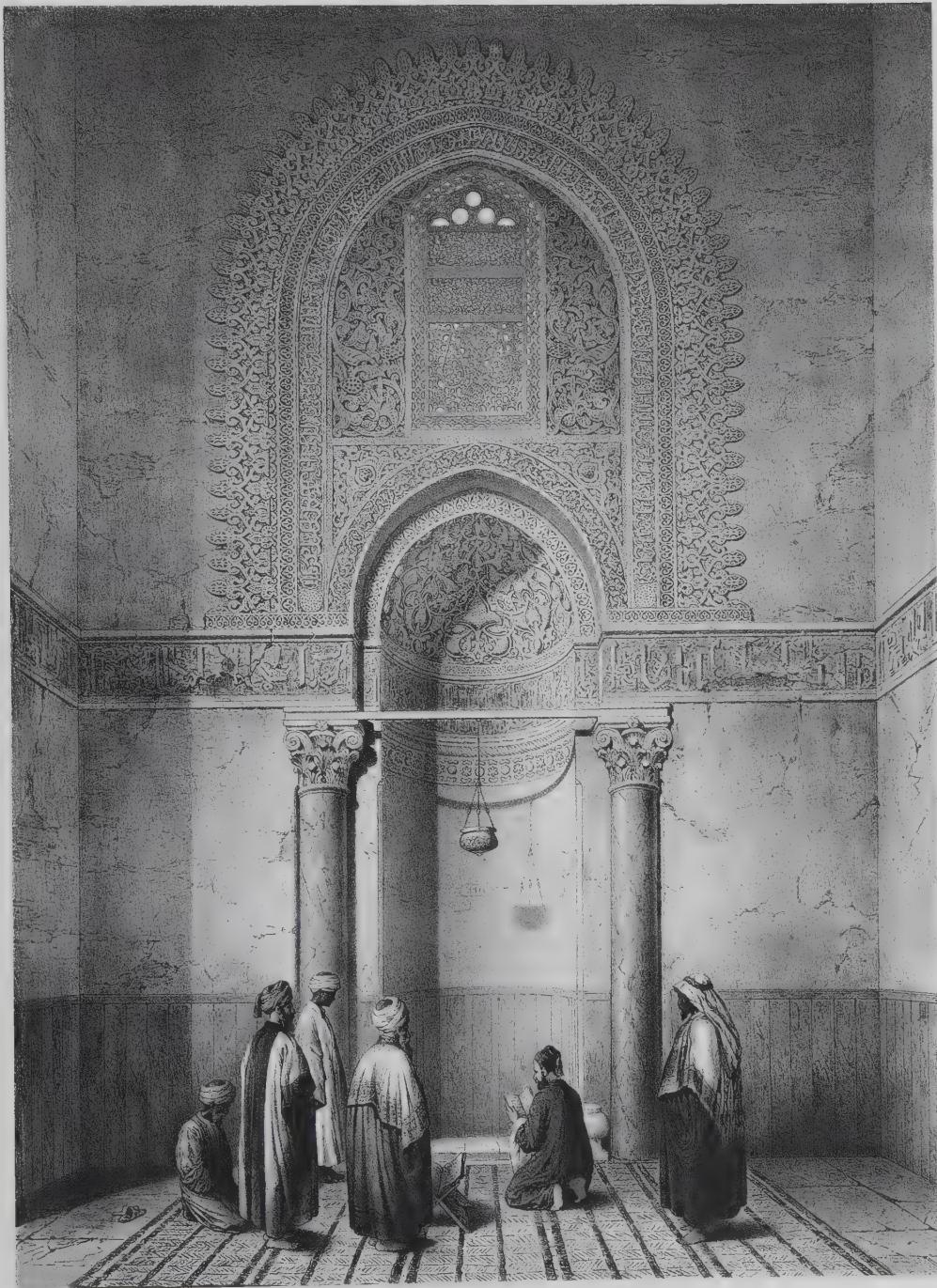
The mosque's portal is remarkable as an architectural system. The artist has explored it as a functioning independent feature and as part of the building. Columns framing inset arches support intricate cascading muqarnas that seemingly support a fluted half-dome.



Door of a house on Sha'arawi Street, 14th century

Popular tradition makes this door part of a qadi's house. Ornament was used to forge a spandrel-like structure; this architectonic device is traced by knots.

Domestic architecture provides insight into popular designs similar to heraldic symbols in imperial architecture.



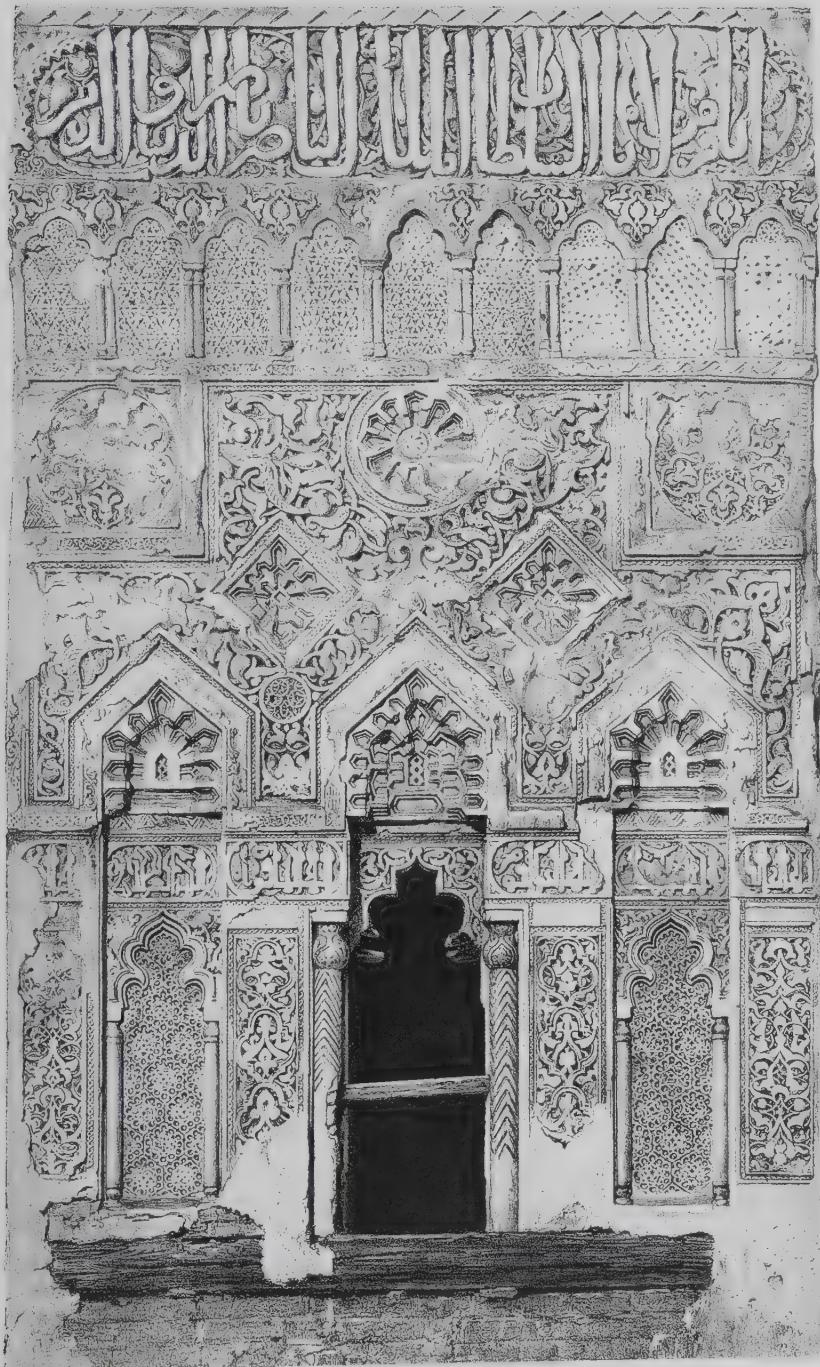
Mosque of Muhammad ibn Qalawaun, view of the mihrab, 14th century

This mihrab, adorned with carved and pierced bosses and arabesques, is set behind an arch supported by columns and capped by a window. It has no precedent in Cairo, although it may in Persia as the patron married a Mongol princess.

Muqarnas adorning the mosque's minaret elevate it into the cityscape. The minaret positions the complex on a main avenue of medieval Cairo. Recessed panels, traced by a knotted motif and false columns, distinguish the octagonal trunk.



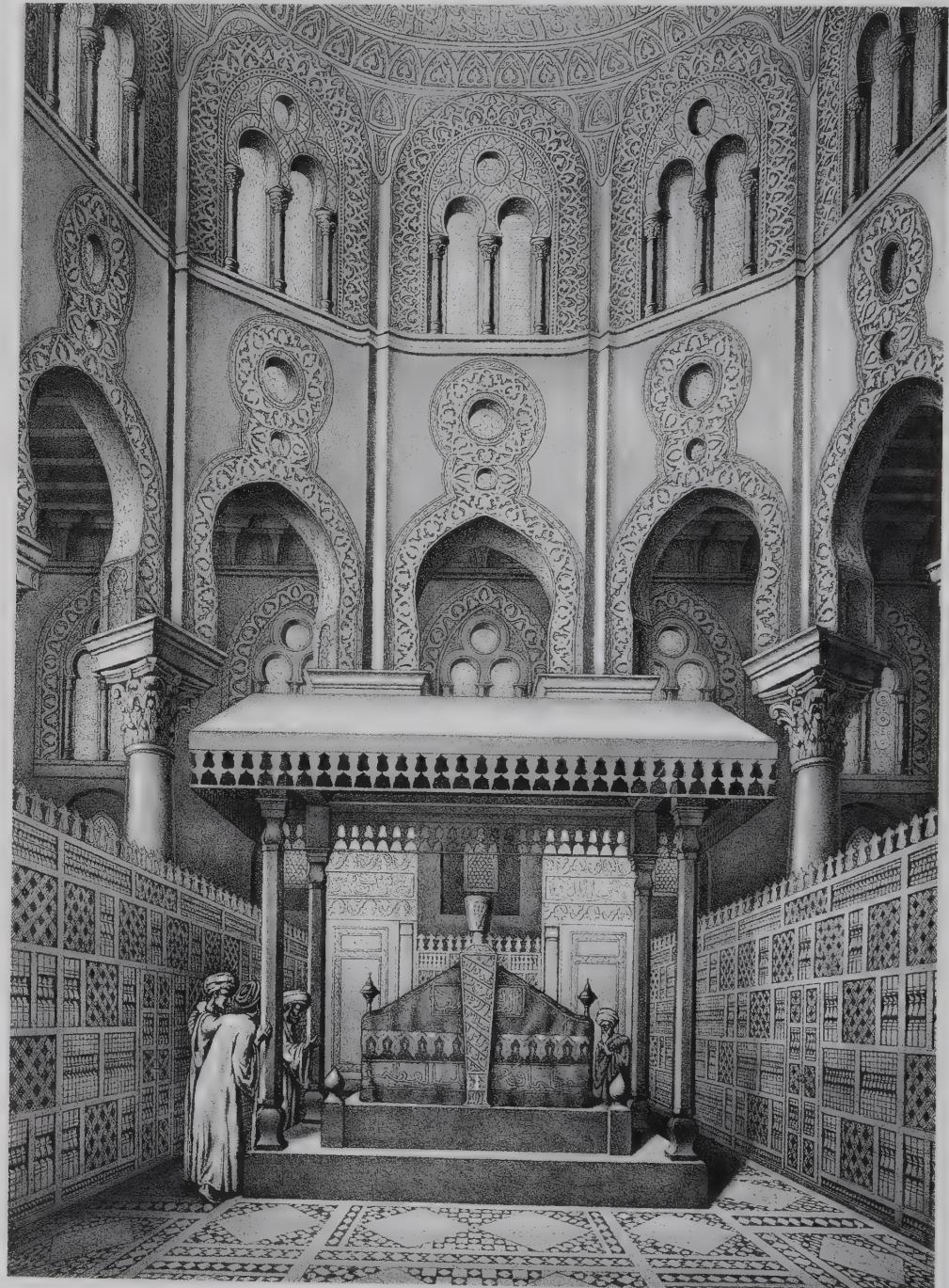
Mosque of Muhammad ibn Qalawaun, view of the minaret, 14th century



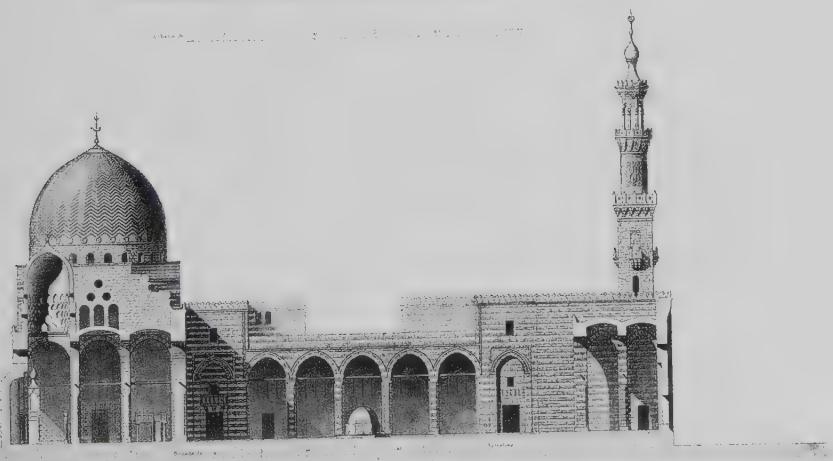
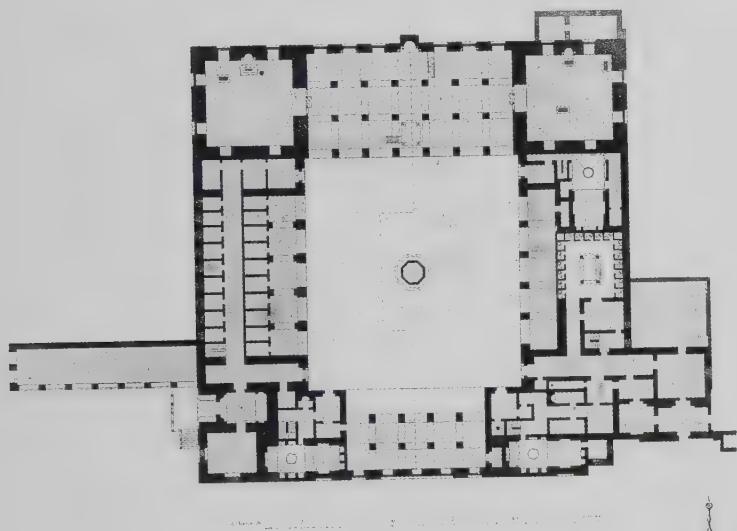
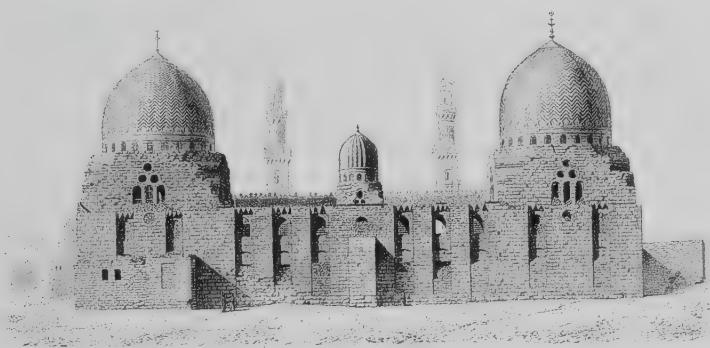
Mosque of Muhammad ibn Qalawaun, details of the minaret, 14th century

The plate captures intricate details of the minaret: laced, carved-stucco arabesques and calligraphic inscriptions that draw connections with designs visible in the interior, specifically around the mihrab.

The mausoleum's symmetrical floor designs and intricate woodwork ground the gaze, while the floor and square pillars, like a swath of light, draw the eyes upward. The octagonal drum, composed of two pairs of piers alternating with two pairs of columns, reflects a debt to the Dome of the Rock.

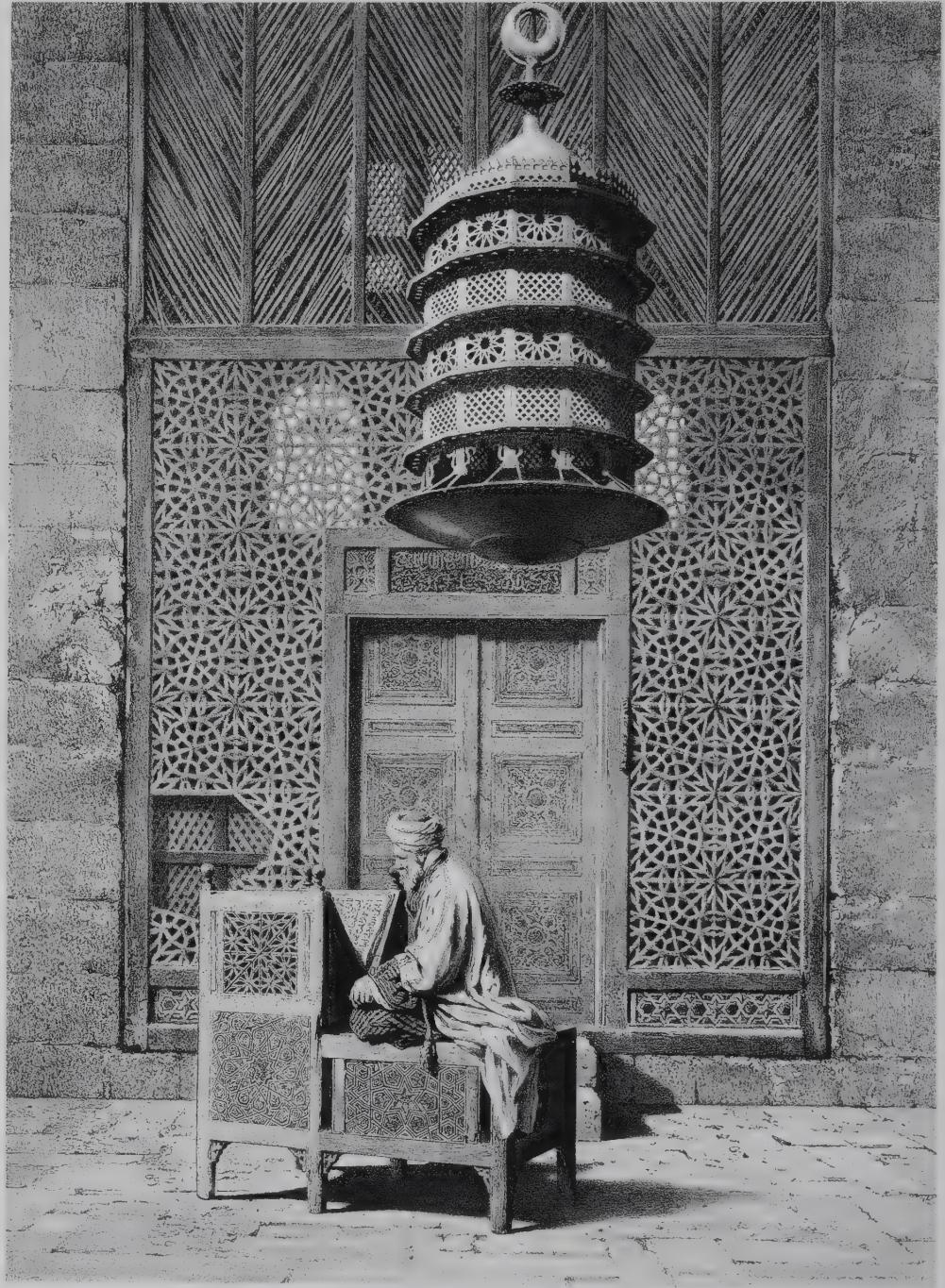


Mausoleum of Sultan Qalawaun, 14th century



Mausoleum complex of Sultan Barquq, plan & section, 14th century

Sultan al-Nasir Faraj built this khanqa and double mausoleum to fulfill his father, Sultan Barquq's wish. Structural symmetry, an anomaly in Mamluke architecture, was possible because of available space and a lack of legal restrictions on building in the cemetery.



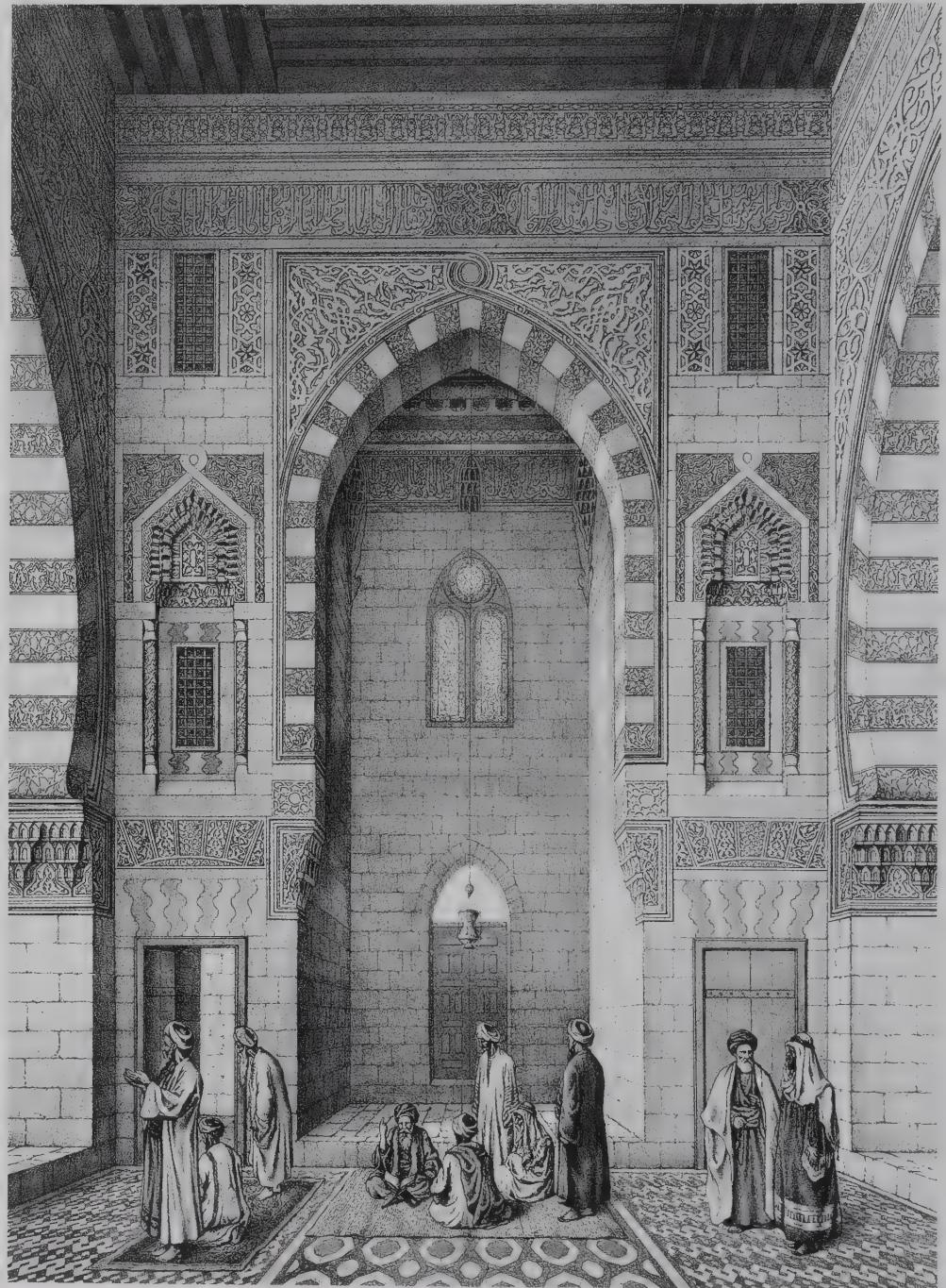
The northern mausoleum, intended for Barquq and his son Faraj, is entered through wooden lattice screens, in front of which sits an intricately carved Quran stand. Carved wood is set against austere stone.

Mausoleum complex of Sultan Barquq, door to the tomb, 14th century



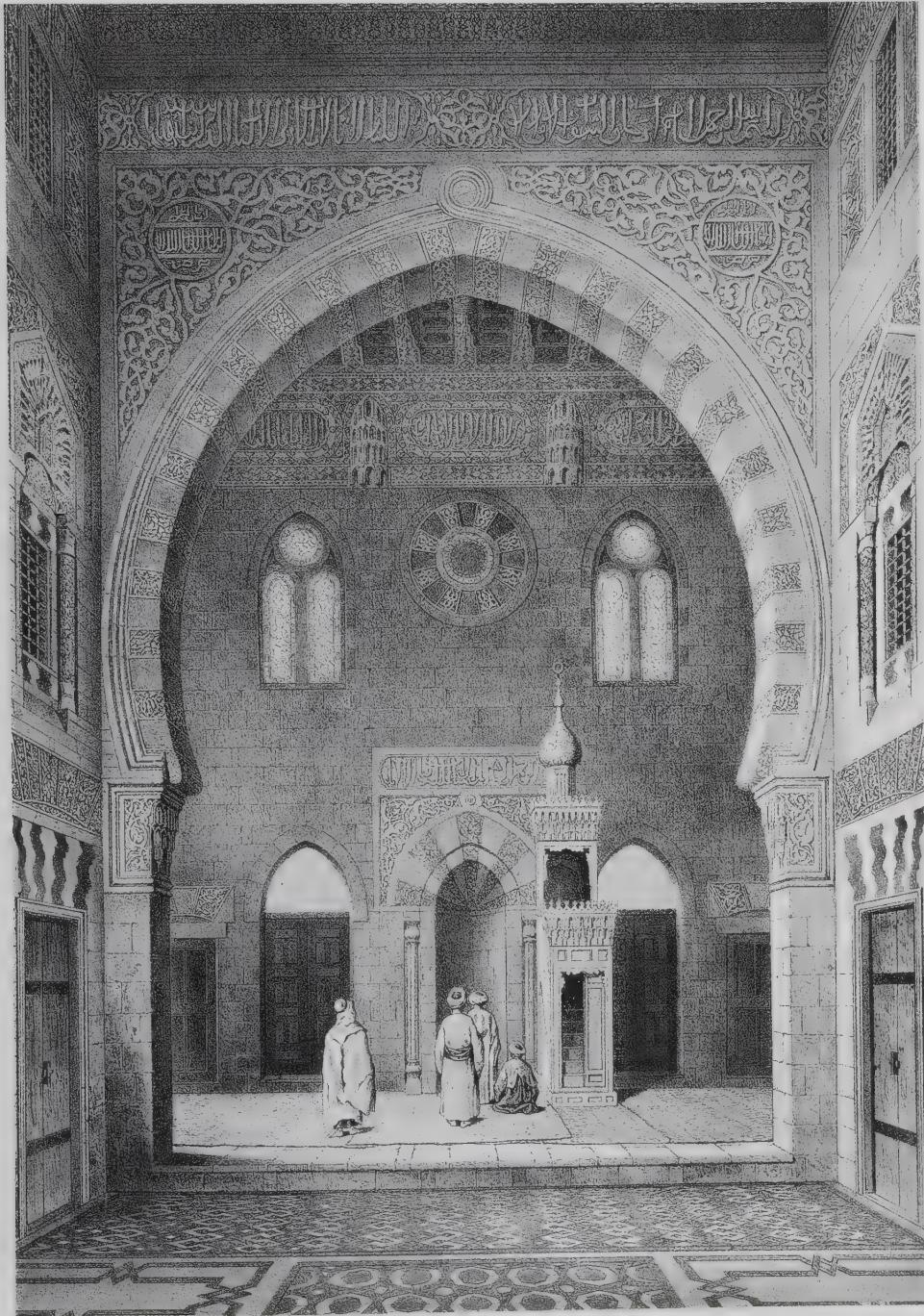
Religious-funerary complex of Qaitbay, 15th century

At this point Cairo architectural programs were guided by interest in fundamental Mamluke architectural forms. Balance was conferred on an angular, seemingly asymmetrical complex by details such as the intricate carvings on the minaret and dome.



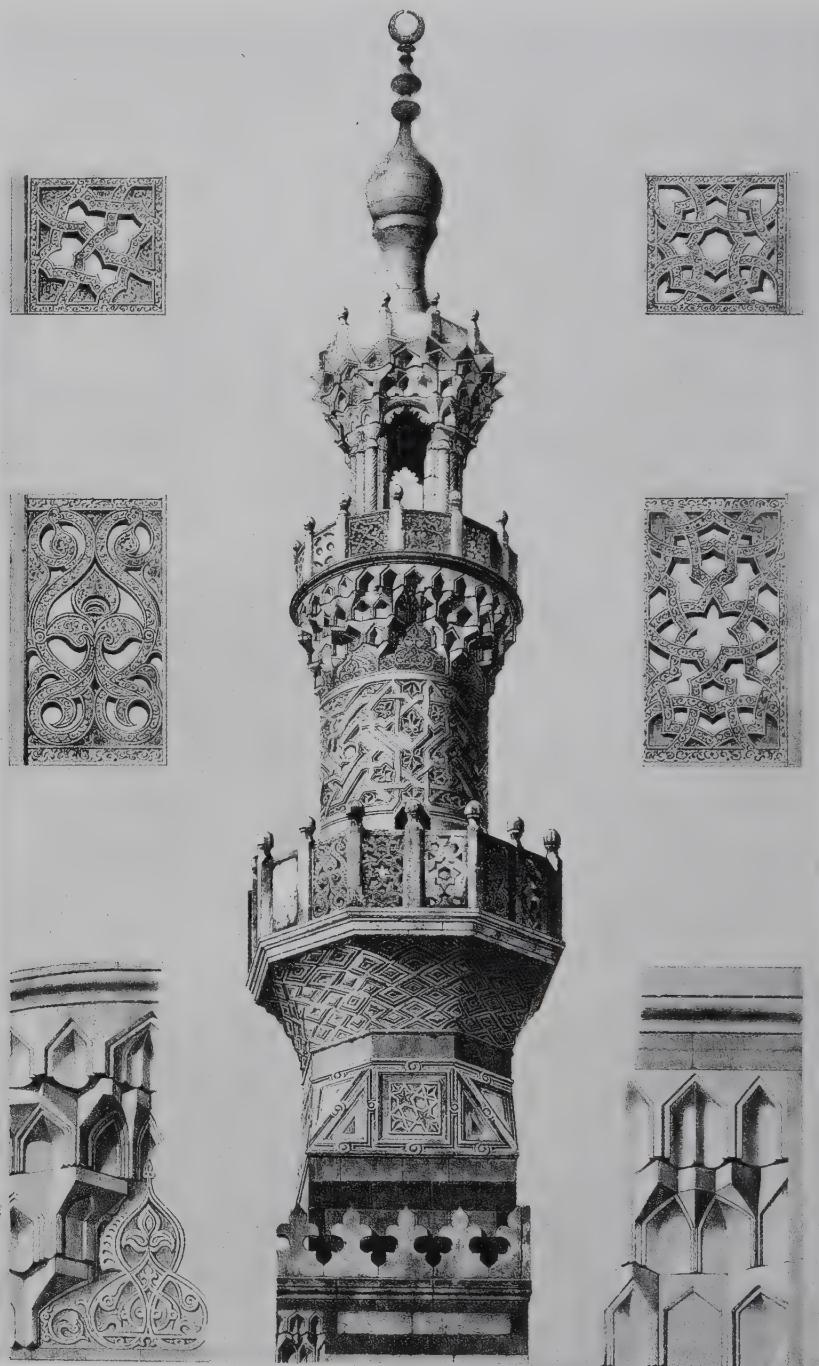
Symmetry is not found in the mosque layout but in the overall impact of its decoration. A lofty portal adorned with polychrome dadoes, columned recesses, and intricate stucco carving, frames the door that leads to the tomb. A continuous band of calligraphy integrates the designs.

Mosque of Qaitbay, elevation of one side, 15th century



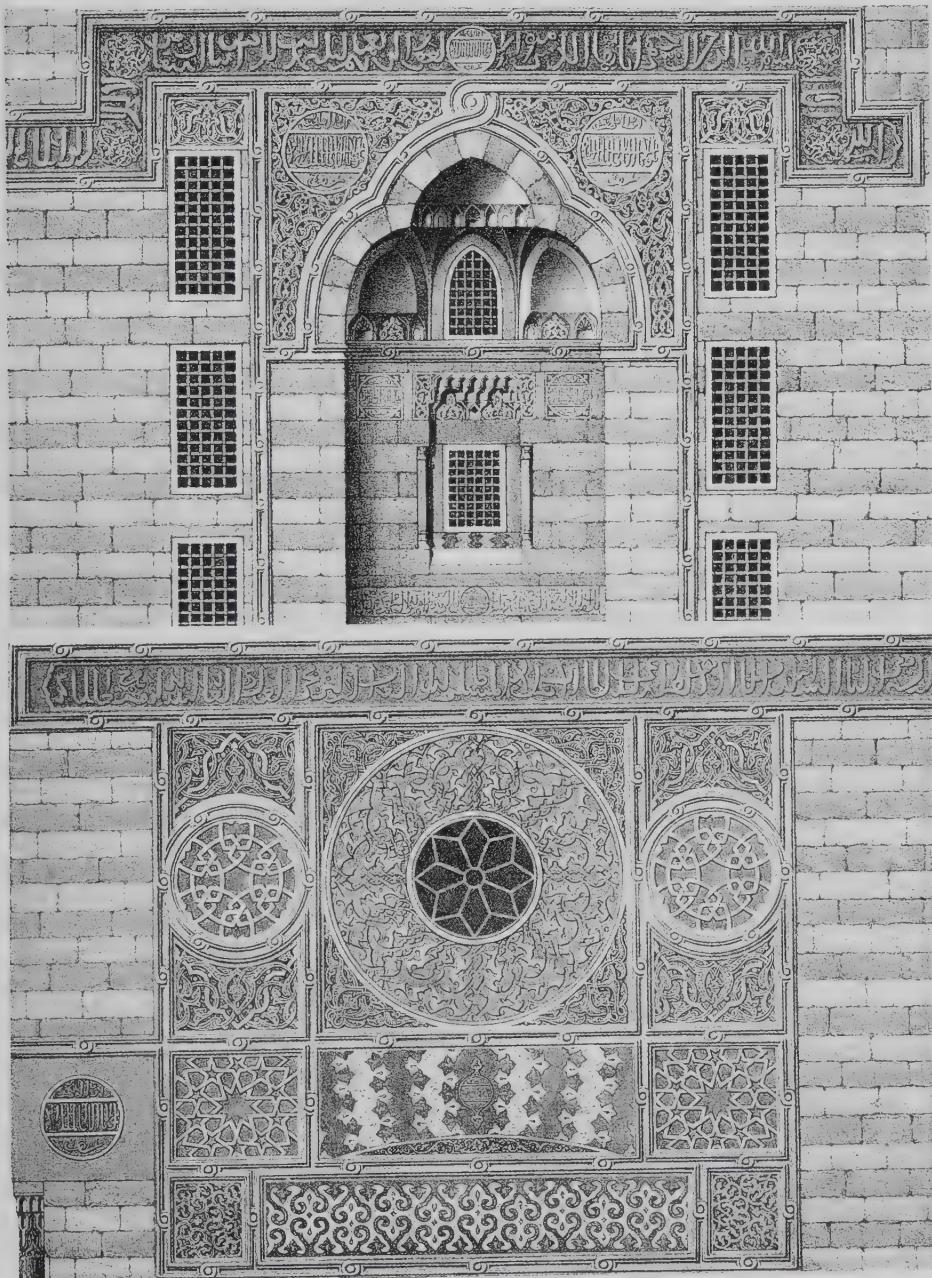
Mosque of Qaitbay, elevation of the mihrab side, 15th century

The massive horseshoe arch framing the mihrab suggests an unlikely airiness in this medium-sized mosque. The qibla wall is austere, placing emphasis on its calligraphy.



The elegantly carved minaret of Qaitbay's complex displays an aesthetic more concerned with cylindrical movements than most Mamluke minarets, which relied more heavily on cubical base forms. Columns, used to further elevate the structure, add lightness to its form.

Mosque of Qaitbay, ensemble & details of the minaret, 15th century



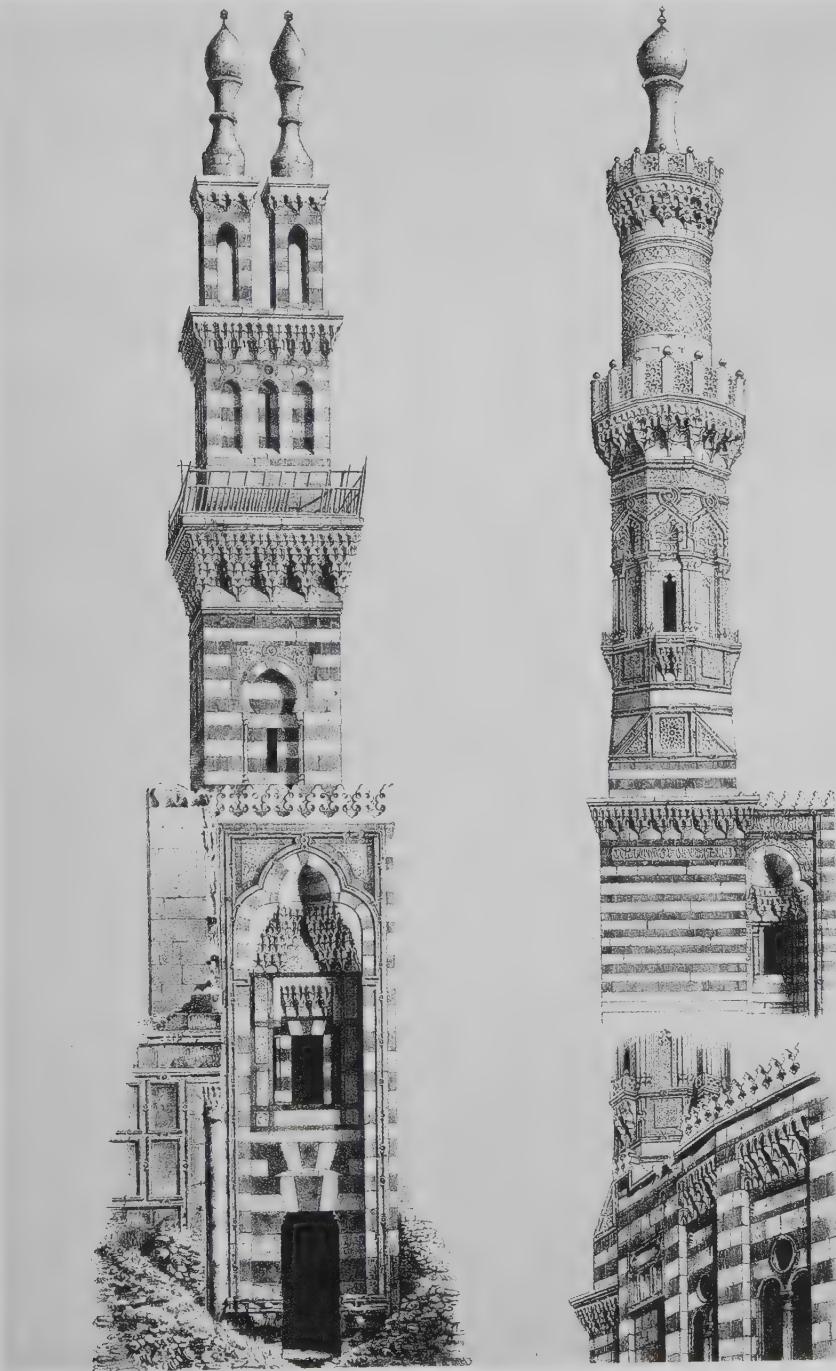
Sabil Qaitbay, near Rumayleh, parts of the facade, 15th century

This sabil on Saliba Street dates to 1479. A trilobed arch surmounts the portal and an unusual medallion design surmounts the iron-grated front windows that characterize sabilis. A band of calligraphy, indicated in both details, hints at the building's design program.

This comparative examination of the minaret of Turab al-Imam mosque and the minaret of the Qalmi mosque reveals that both were based on an octagonal plan and both had similar muqamas designs.



Minarets of Turab al-Imam mosque, 15th century, and Qalmi mosque, 16th century



Minarets of Qanibay al-Rammah at Nasiriyah mosque, 15th century & al-Burdayni mosque, 17th century

Contrasting minarets, cubical and cylindrical—both have trilobed arches, muqamas, and alternating vertical and horizontal voussoirs. The Nasiriyah minaret exploits alternating voussoir designs featured in the portal frame, whereas the al-Burdayni mosque displays intricate carvings.



This view highlights the mausoleum's dome and mosque's minaret, which crown the mercantile area below. The double-bulbed minaret, not part of the original structure, was inspired by minarets from the mosques of Qanibay al-Rammah as well as al-Ghuri at al-Azhar.

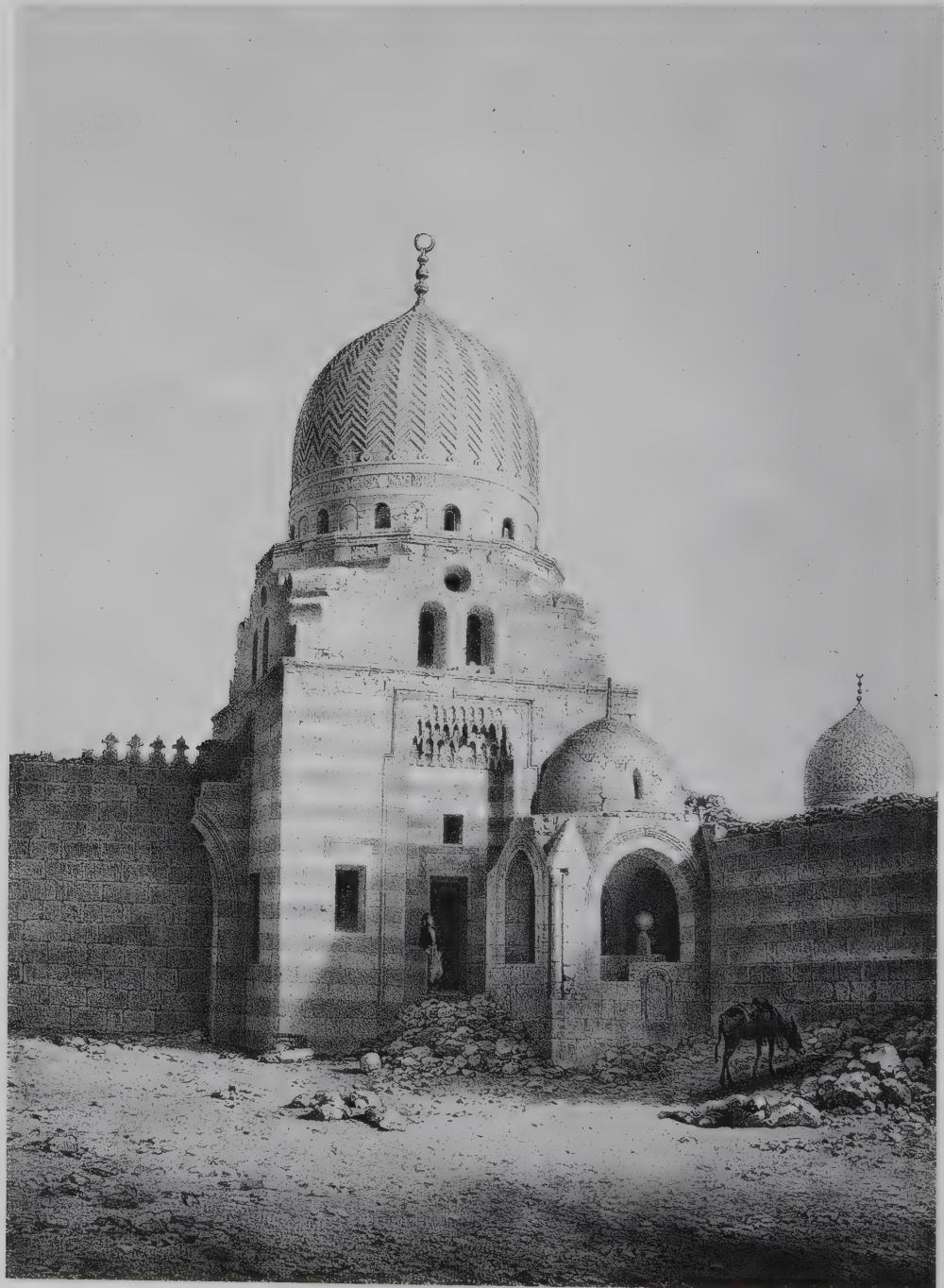
Mosque and mausoleum of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, 16th century

This depiction alludes to a larger complex. The artist has articulated the dome's double-leaf cresting, three arched panels surmounted by windows in the form of three oculi, and the shoulder that decorates the transition zone.



Mausoleum of Emir Tarabay al-Sharifi, 16th century

Prisse focused on this tomb because to his mind the adjoining mosque bore no distinguishing features, whereas the tomb abided wholeheartedly with prevailing Mamluke conventions. Bichrome masonry work integrated the tomb with the whole complex.

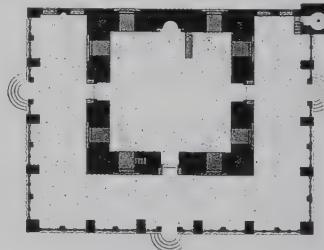
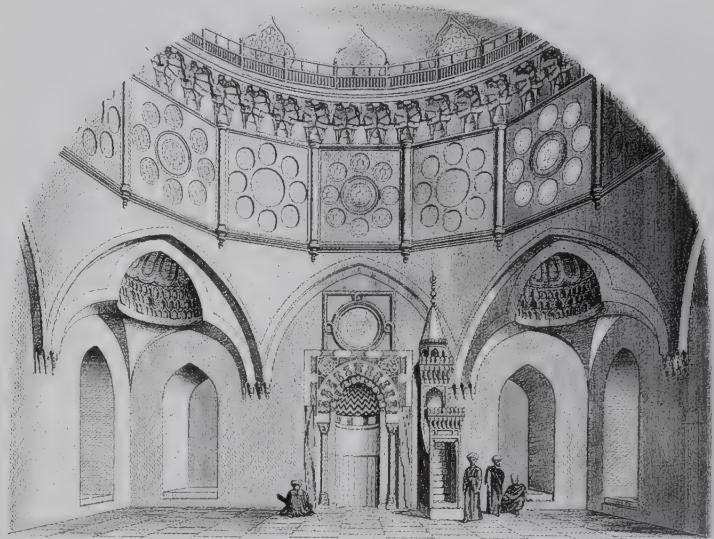


Mausoleum of Emir Mahmud Janum, 16th century

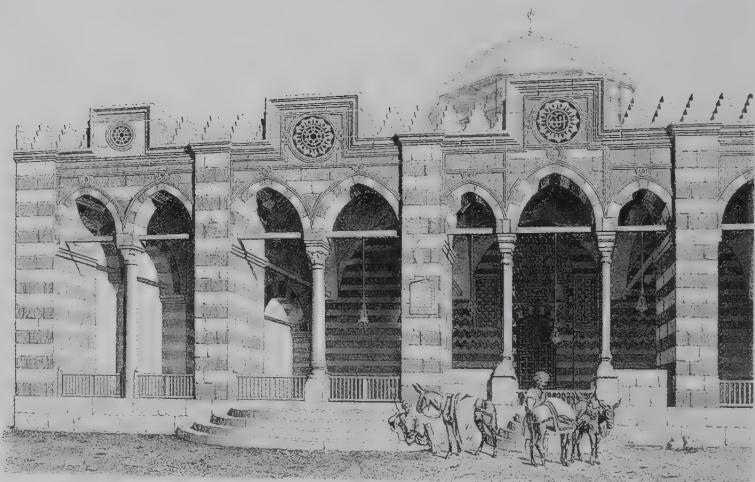


Dome and minaret of Khayr-Bek, 16th century

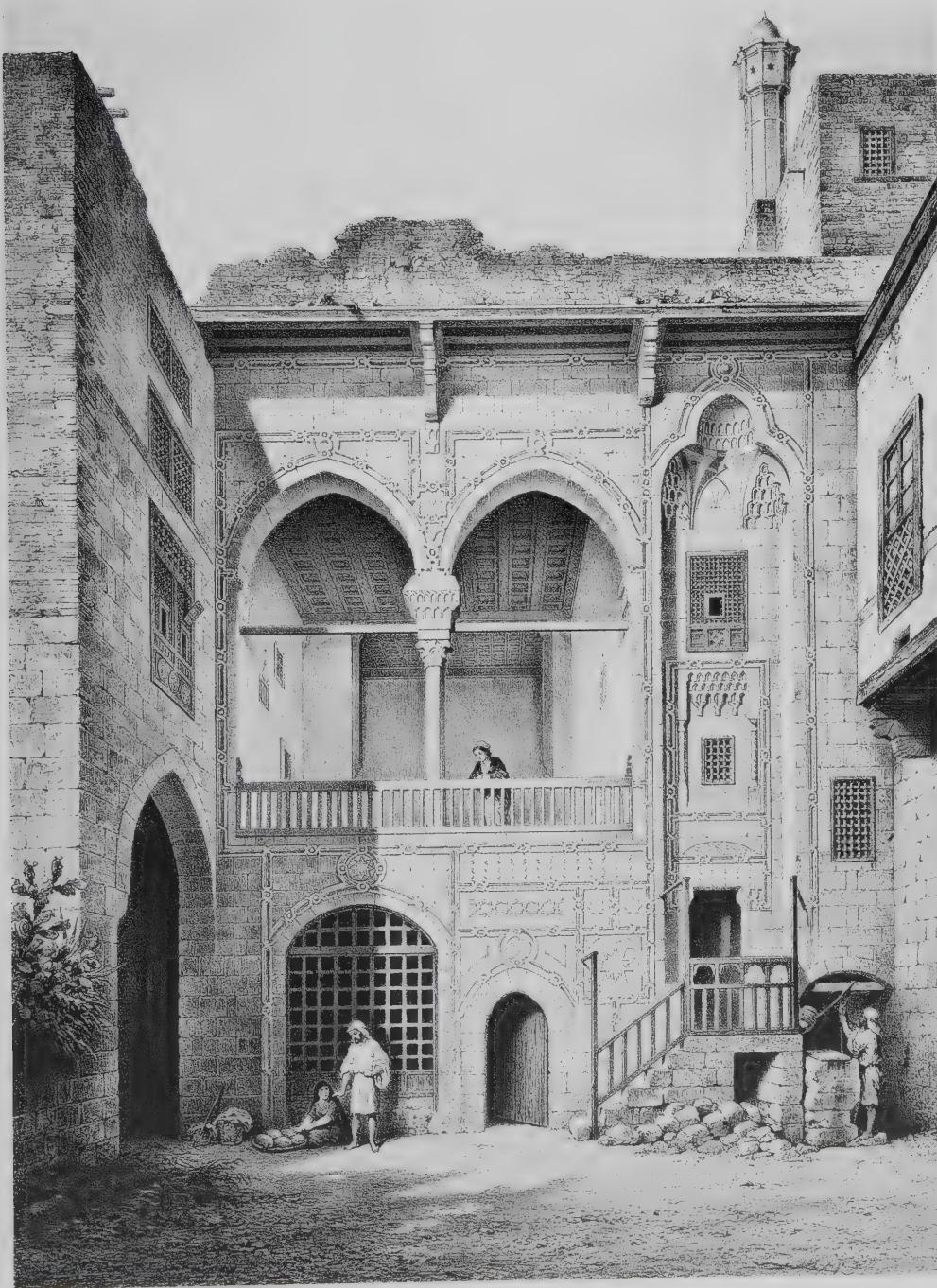
Prisse discusses this essentially Mamluke design as an anomaly. Although Emir Khayr-Bek betrayed Sultan al-Ghuri and cooperated with the Ottomans, for which he was favored with the governorship of Egypt, opportunism did not override his aesthetic sensibilities.



Prisse's elevations and plan of the mosque of Sinan Pasha convey the Ottoman impact on Egyptian architecture. He derides self-conscious designs that boast magnificence, highlighting the structure's squatness and the lack of relationship between prayer hall and sahn.

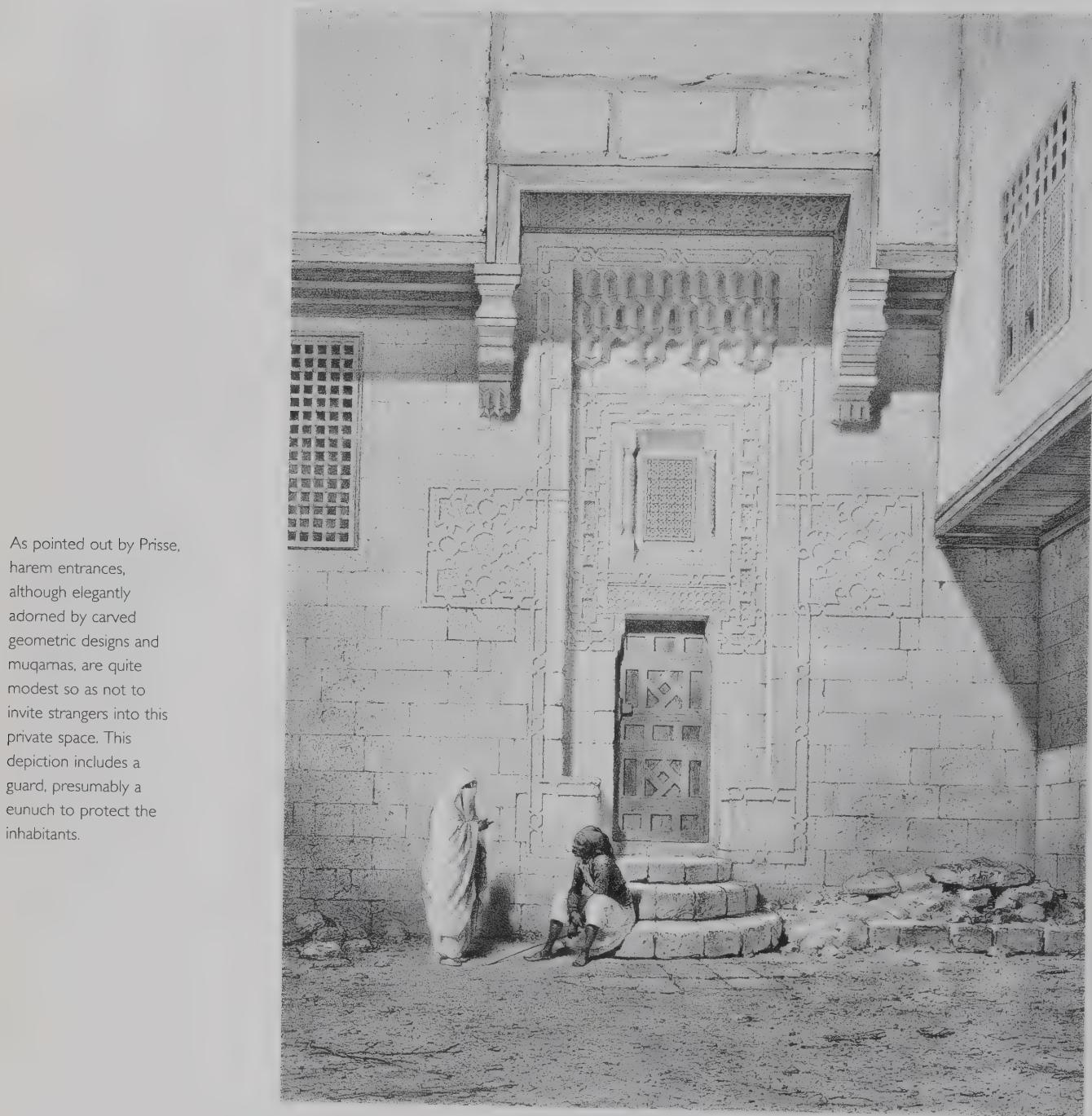


Mosque of Sinan Pasha, elevation & plan, 16th century



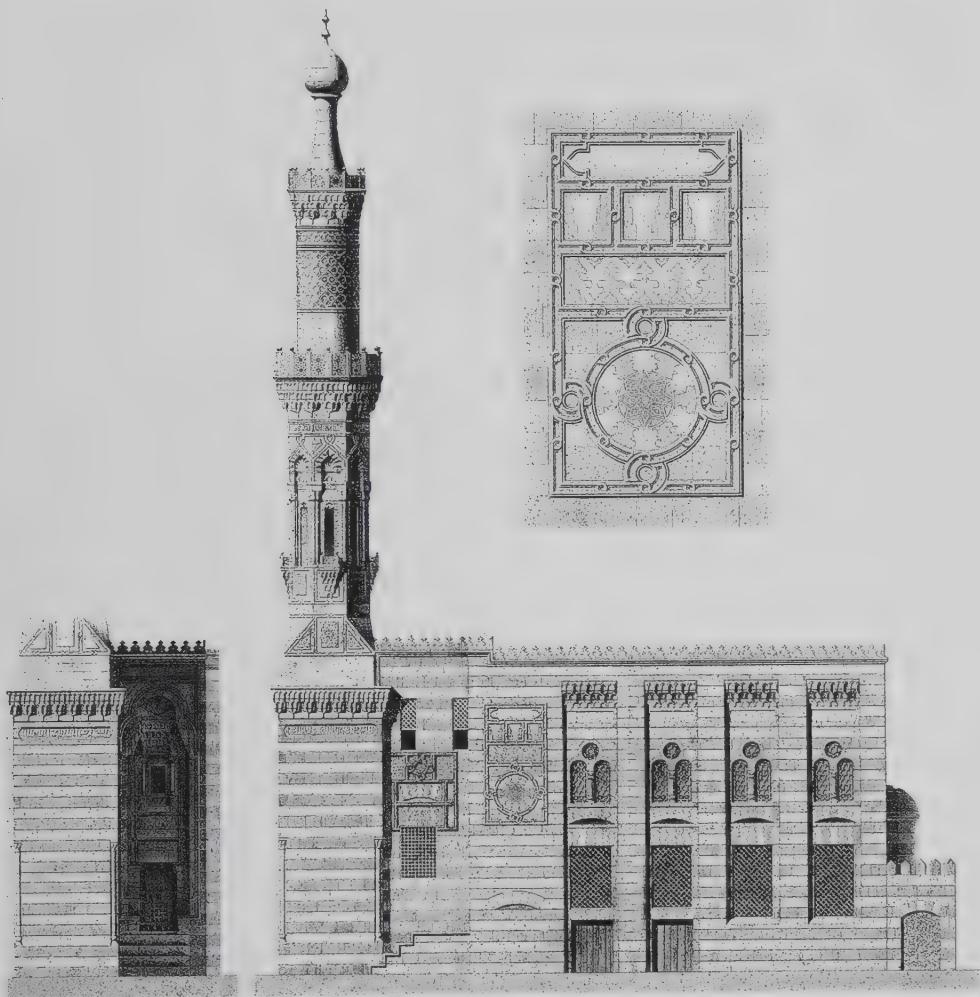
Bayt al-Emir, courtyard, 17th century

Prisse, intrigued by social history, has captured the heart of Bayt al-Emir—the courtyard. He examines degrees of privacy through emphasis on several key features: the central grid window, evocative of a sabil facade; the arch-lined hall above; and the mashrabiya coverings.

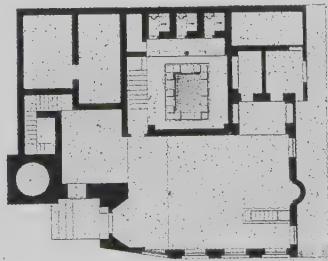
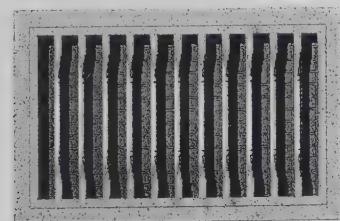


As pointed out by Prisse, harem entrances, although elegantly adorned by carved geometric designs and muqamas, are quite modest so as not to invite strangers into this private space. This depiction includes a guard, presumably a eunuch to protect the inhabitants.

Bayt al-Emir, outer door to the harem, 17th century



Shown in elevation, details, and a plan, the mosque appears to revive Mamluke building designs of the Qaitbay period. The absence of the Ottoman-style cascading domes and austere facades hints at the patron's Egyptian roots.



Mosque of Shaykh al-Burdayni, elevation, details, & plan, 17th century

This mosque shows how various edifices were grouped around tombs. The facade shows a small room where travelers and passers-by could stay or rest. Next to the tomb, crowned by a pyramidal dome, is a sabil-kuttab—a school and cistern.



Funerary mosque near Kiman al-Jiyushi, 18th century



Tomb of an emir in the Qarafa cemetery, 18th century

This tomb in the southern cemetery (Qarafa) is defined by its elegant columns and light dome which effects airiness and modesty. The canopied dome is typical of tombs that from the Mamluke period onward could be purchased ready-designed.



Sabil Ahmad Husayn Marjush, 18th century



Zawiyyat Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda, 18th century

In 1729, Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda built a zawiya—housing for Sufis—on two levels above a few shops. This was but one of his contributions to Cairo's cityscape. Prisse draws parallels between its decoration and that of European Renaissance styles.



Door of the bath Hammam al-Talat, 18th century



Bayt al-Shalabi, courtyard, 18th century

With Prisse's focus on details at multiple depths, the complexities of domesticity emerge. Private and public space are explored with social constructs that position people in the building: male servants busy themselves on the ground, a female servant looks on from above, while cloistered ladies are presumably hidden behind the mashrabiya.

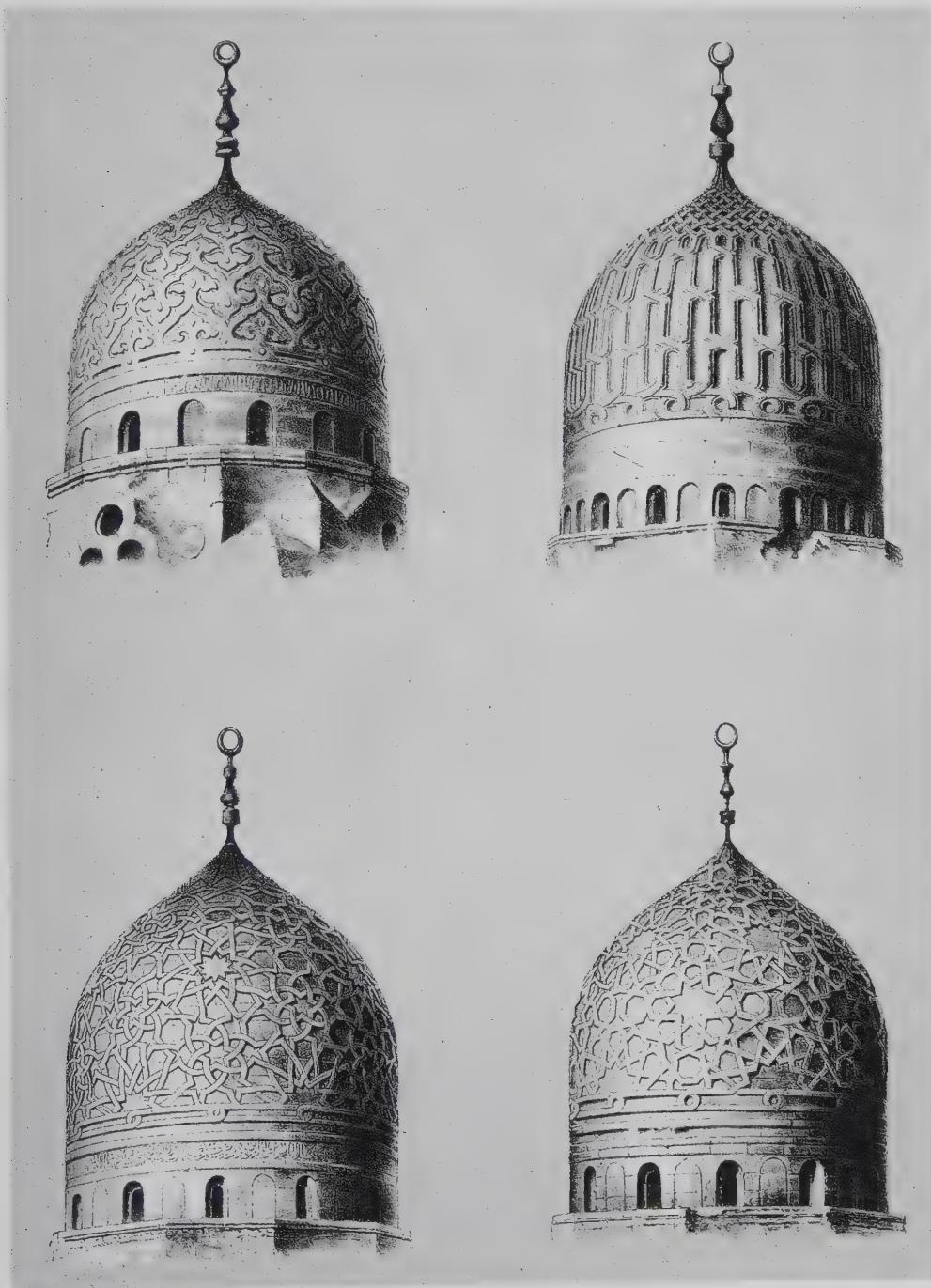


Although Prisse attributes stylistic significance to domes, he treats them randomly and not as reflective of transfers and adaptations of building technology. These four designs, though essentially linear, embody dense, fleshy arabesques typical of later Mamluke domes.

- (1) Emir Ganim al-Bahlawan (1510);
- (2) Emir Khayr-Bek (1502);
- (3) Emir Sulayman (1544);
- (4) Emir Qanibay al-Sayfi (1503).

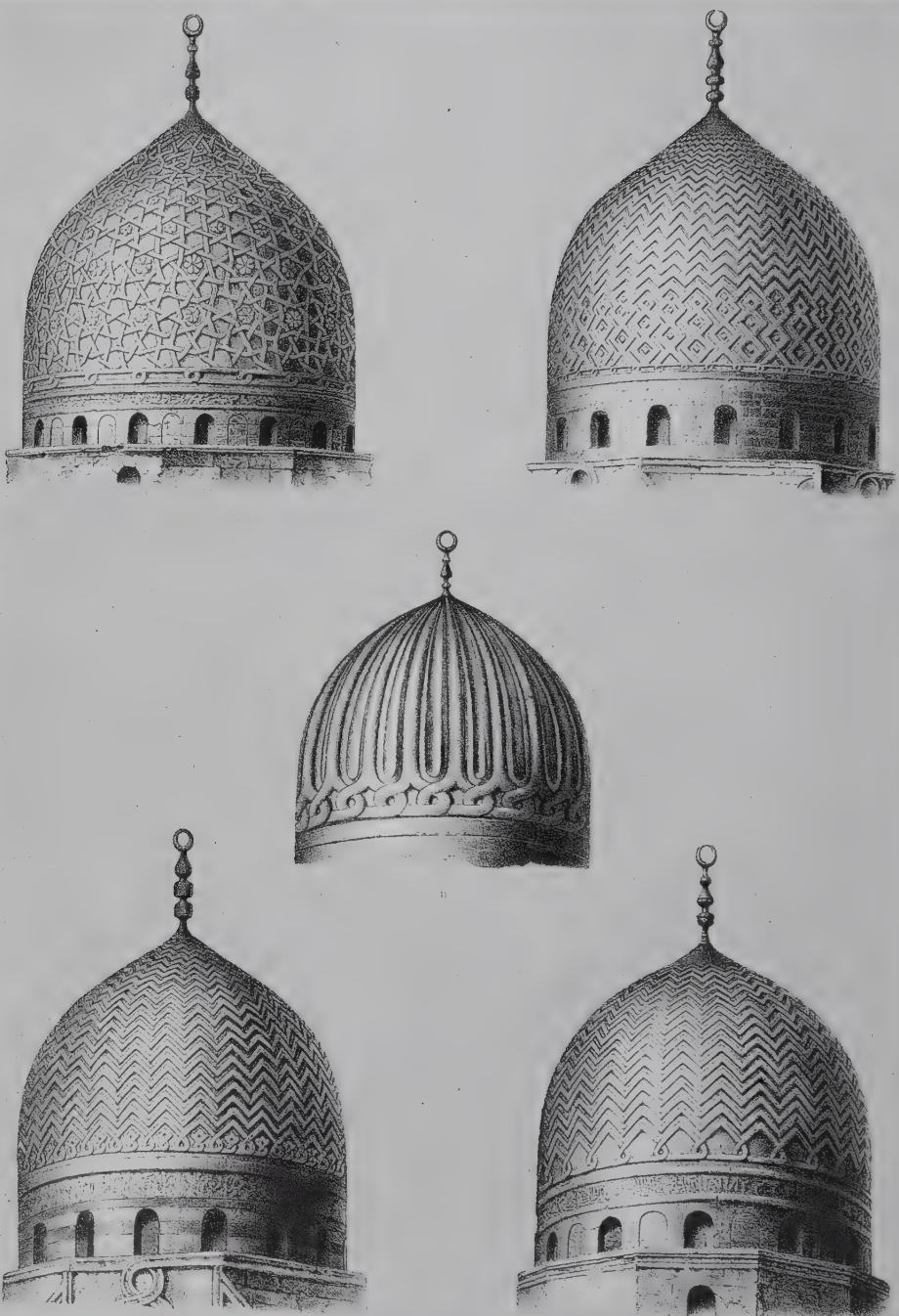


Domes (1-4)



Domes (5-8)

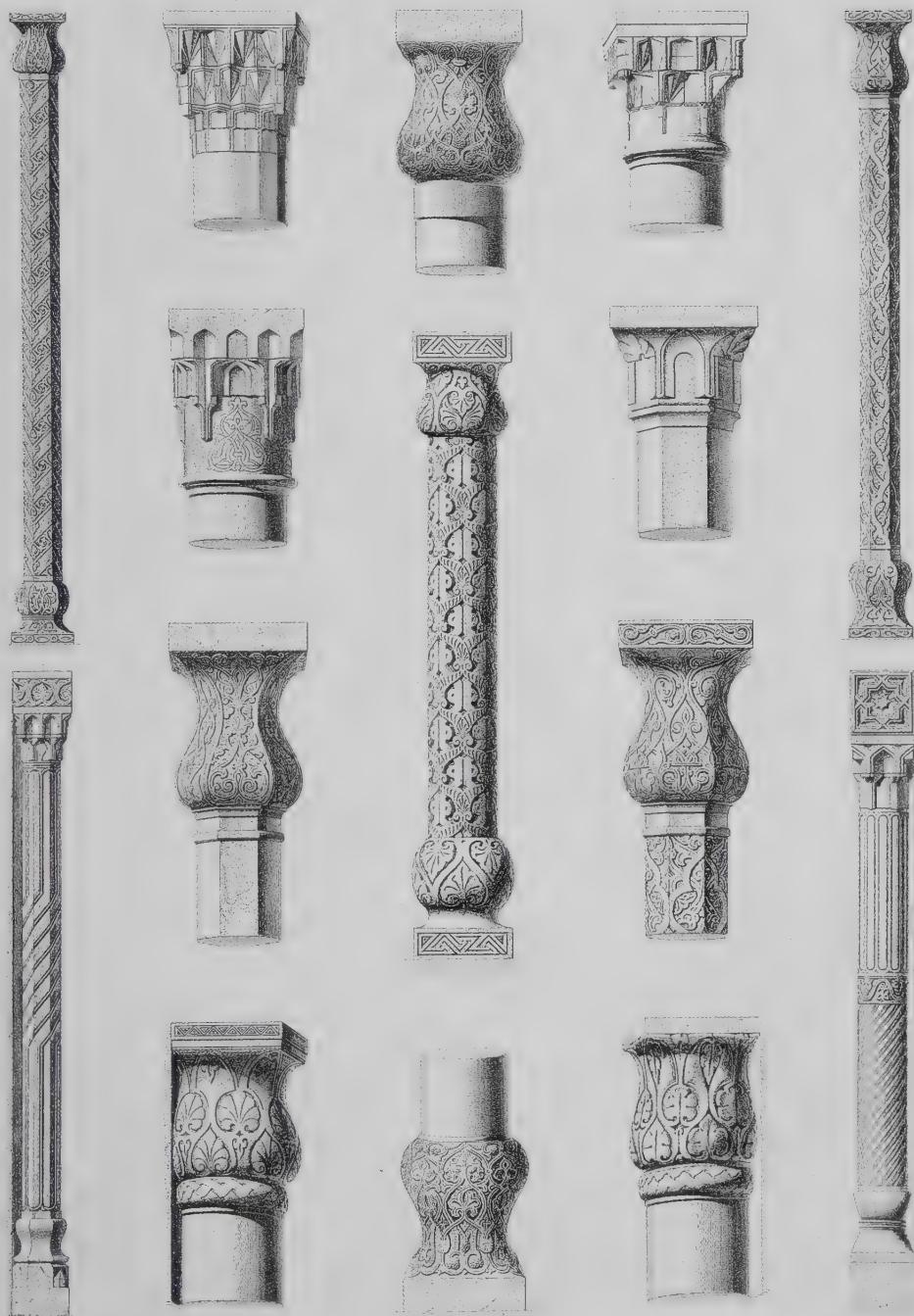
Tractable limestone, used especially in domes, lends itself to the artisan's hands. The elaborate rib designs found in early (top right) domes are contrasted with lighter interlaced star patterns which were first featured in Sultan Barsbay's mausoleum in the northern cemetery. (5) Emir Azrumuk (1503-5); (6) Taghri Bardi (1440); (7) Sultan Barsbay for Emir Ganibak (1432); and (8) Sultan Barsbay for members of the court—in the hawsh (1432).



Stone as opposed to brick is the underlying theme in this set of domes. The central dome displays an interpretation of functional brick ribs into architectonic stone ones. Further developments, particularly zigzagged designs, lighten solid stone ribs with changes of direction at vertical joints.

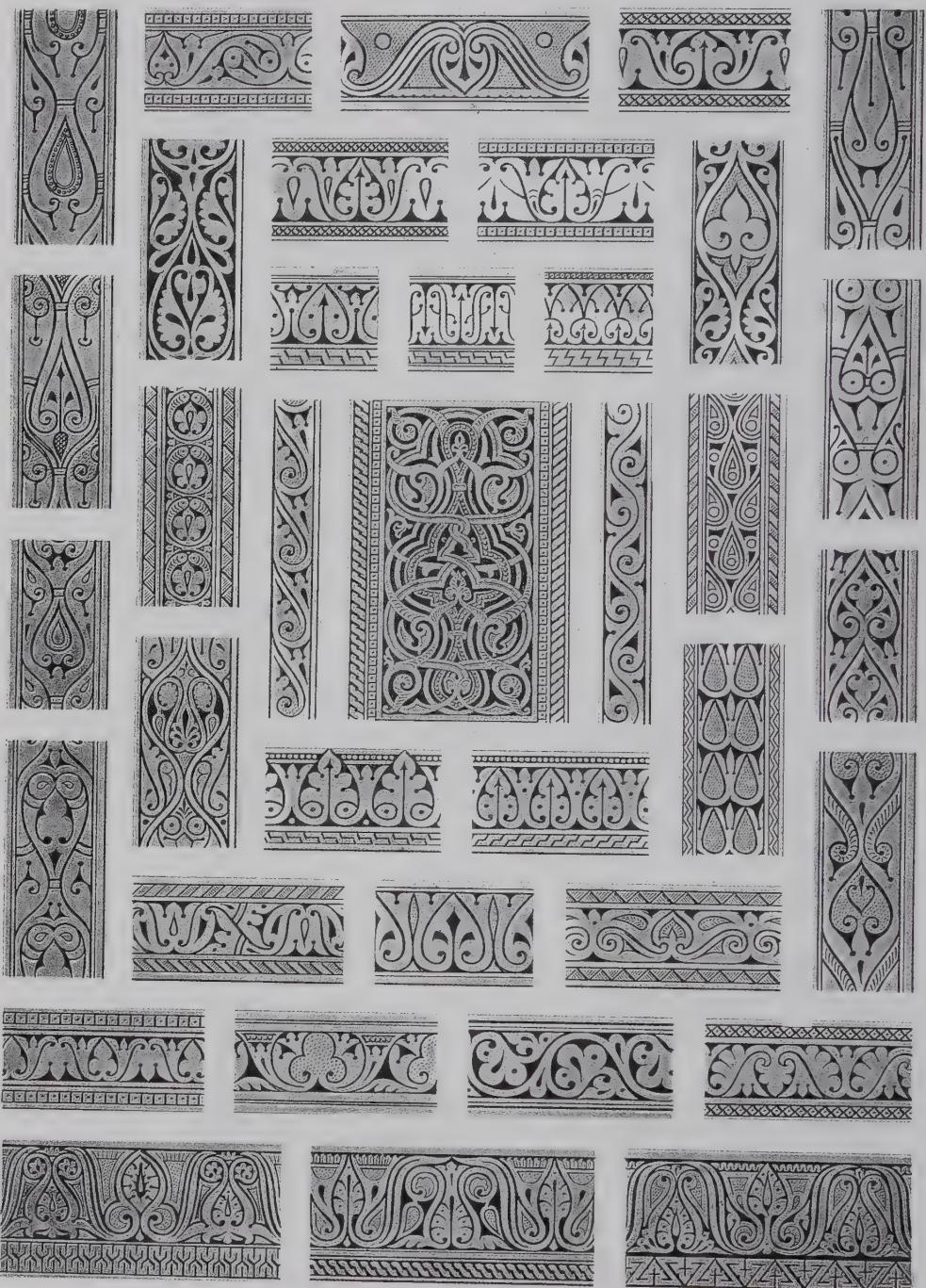
(9) Sultan Barsbay, Khanqa mausoleum (1432);
(10) Emir Qurqmas (1506);
(11) Emir Inal al-Yusufi (1392-93);
(12) Emir Ganibak at the madrasa (1426-27); and
(13) Khanqa of Faraj ibn Barquq (1411).

Domes (9-13)



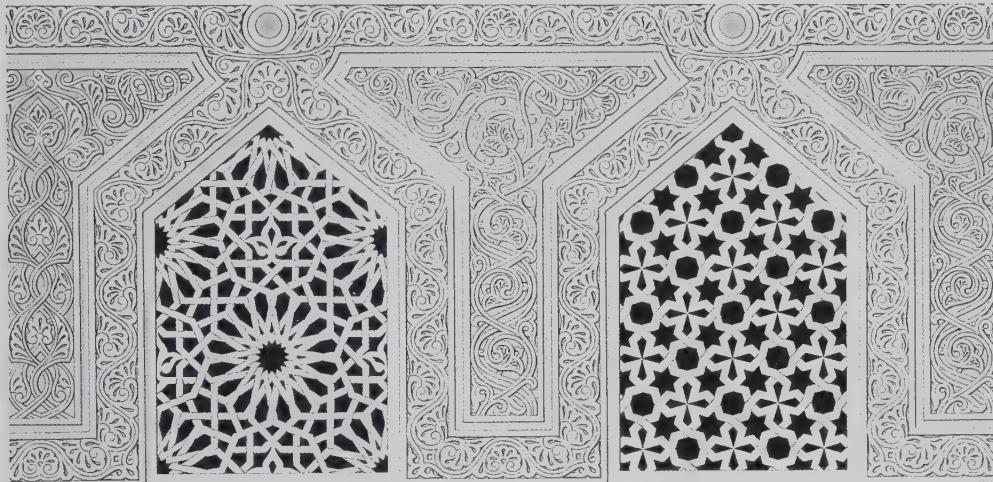
Columns & pillars, ensemble & details

Columns and pillars serve a universal function but bear varied ornamentation. Often removed from one building to be used in another, they could be a key medium for transmitting designs, an attractive idea when materials like marble were not available locally.

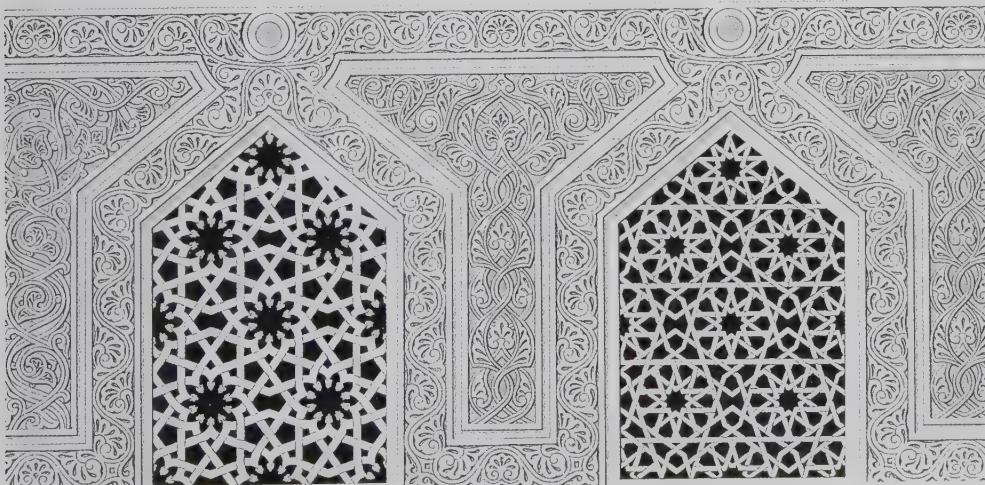


Three distinct patterns taken from Samarra are combined and mixed, providing schemes of ornament that frame arches and decorate soffits. Central are pointed leaves, some of which blossom into a trefoil, and short thick undulated stems which converge at the top.

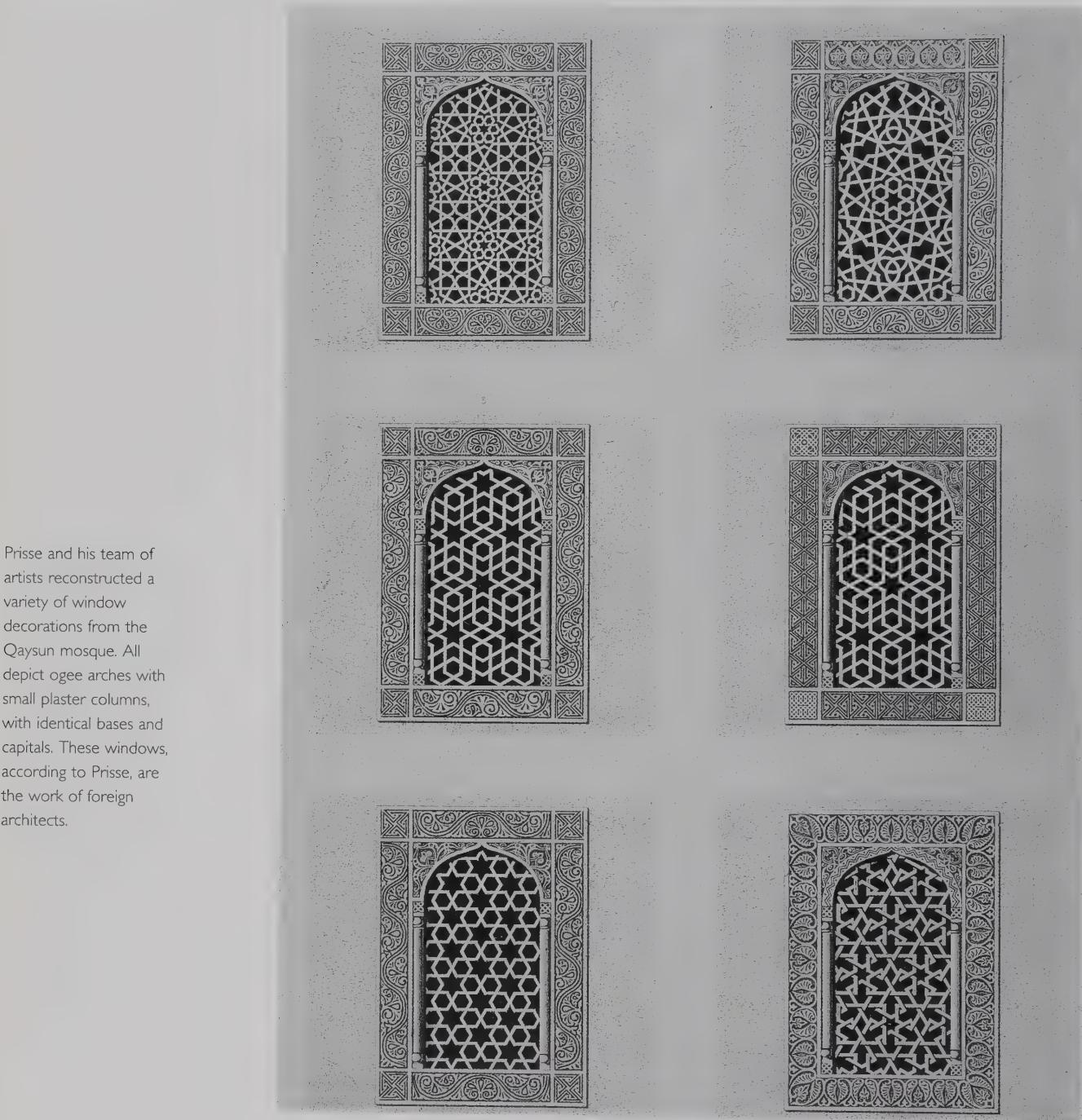
Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun, ornamental details, 9th century



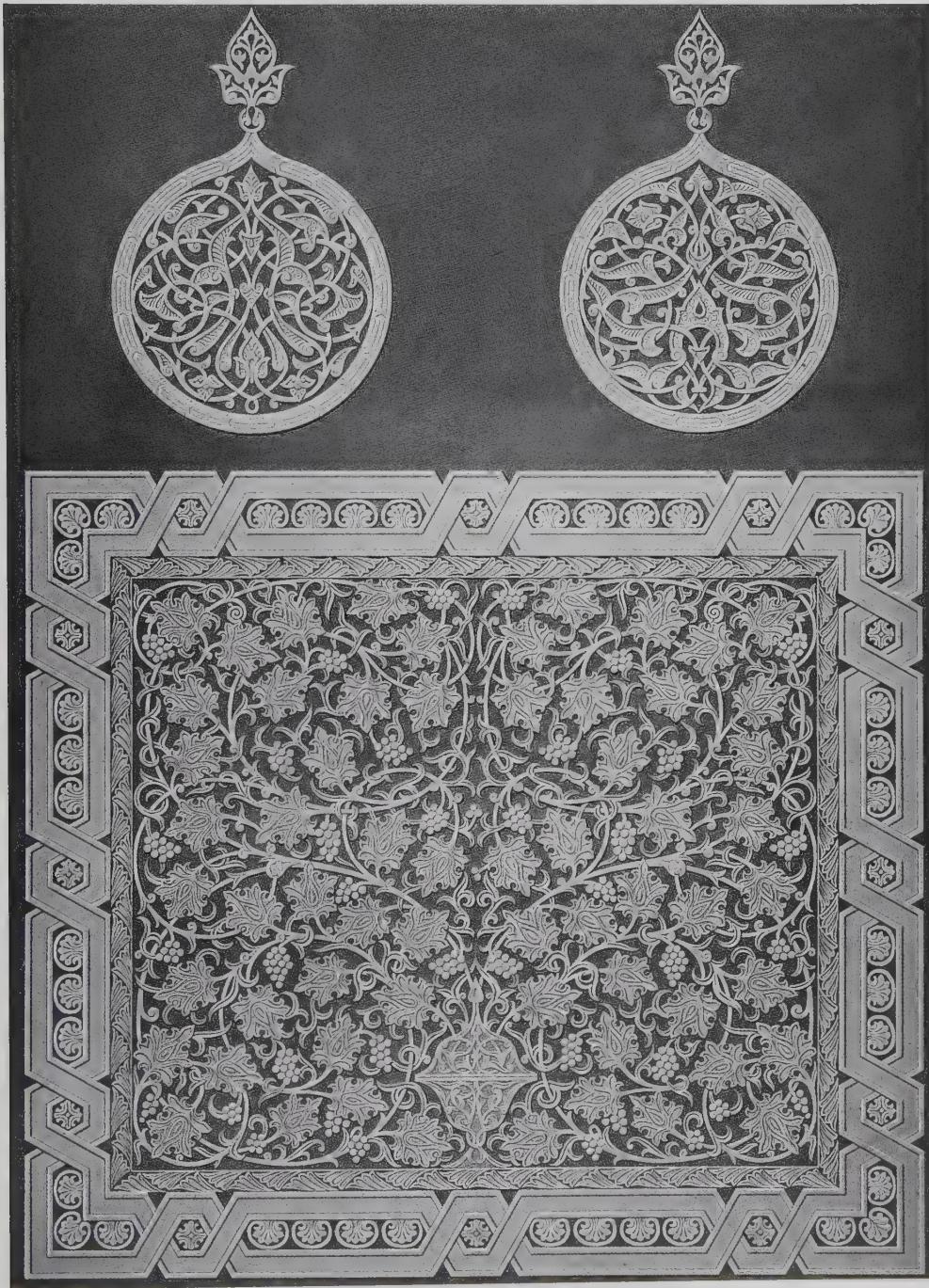
Fragments of the dome's exterior ornamentation—pier frieze and window—show harmony preserved by the more or less symmetrical arabesque frame, although all windows are varied.



Tekiyat al-Shaykh Hasan Sadaqa, fragments of dome decoration, 14th century



Qaysun mosque, interior window decorations, 14th century



Bayt al-Emir, crowning of the bath door, 17th century

Despite its decay, in Prisse's time this exhibited remnants of two different illuminated designs. The vine leaves emerging from the vase appear to have been gilded. Elsewhere the leaves were pale green, vine branches dark green, and grapes blue.



These wall mosaics seem to endlessly repeat themselves, suggesting eternity. By the 13th century, Mamluke Cairo was a significant center for craftsmen from Mosul; specializing in inlay, they took an independent path, completely abandoning figural images.

Wall mosaics, 12th & 14th centuries



Funerary mosque of Sultan Barquq, details of the minbar, 14th century

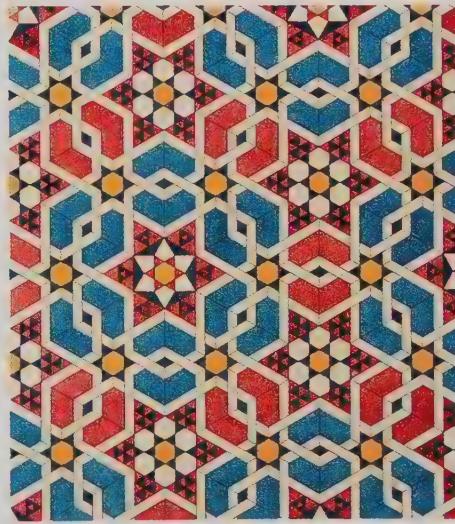
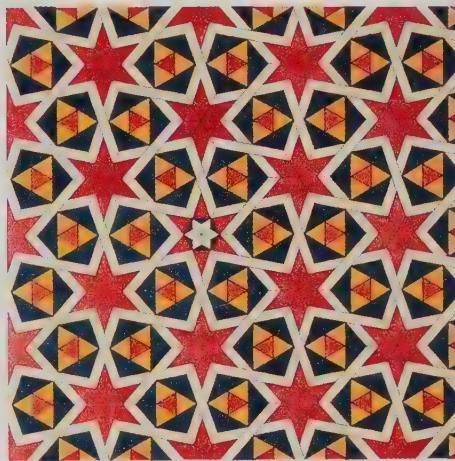
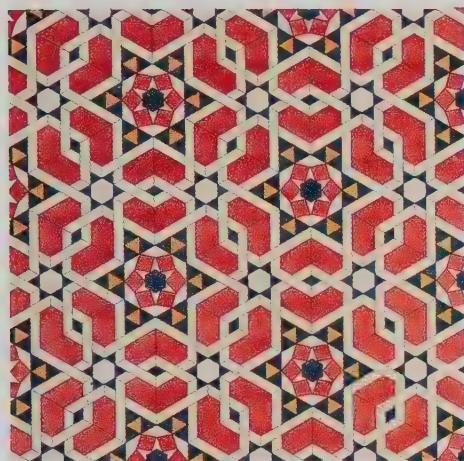
The minbar, gift of Qaitbay, is revealed in all its details. Zigzag carved columns raise a peculiar lancet arch that seems to challenge gravity, creating an ornamental frame for the amalgam of carvings.



Mosaic paneling on the tomb of Barsbay illustrates the use of marble's rich grain for textural enhancement. Naturalistic centers are framed by brilliantly constructed geometric frames. The unified piece weaves together symbols of human effort, nature, and God.



Tomb of Barsbay, mosaic paneling



Wall mosaics, 15th & 16th centuries

Wall mosaics dating to the 15th and 16th centuries display geometric patterns, an aesthetic analogy with Islam's emphasis on repetitive ritual. Six-pointed star patterns can serve as either independent motifs or visual links.



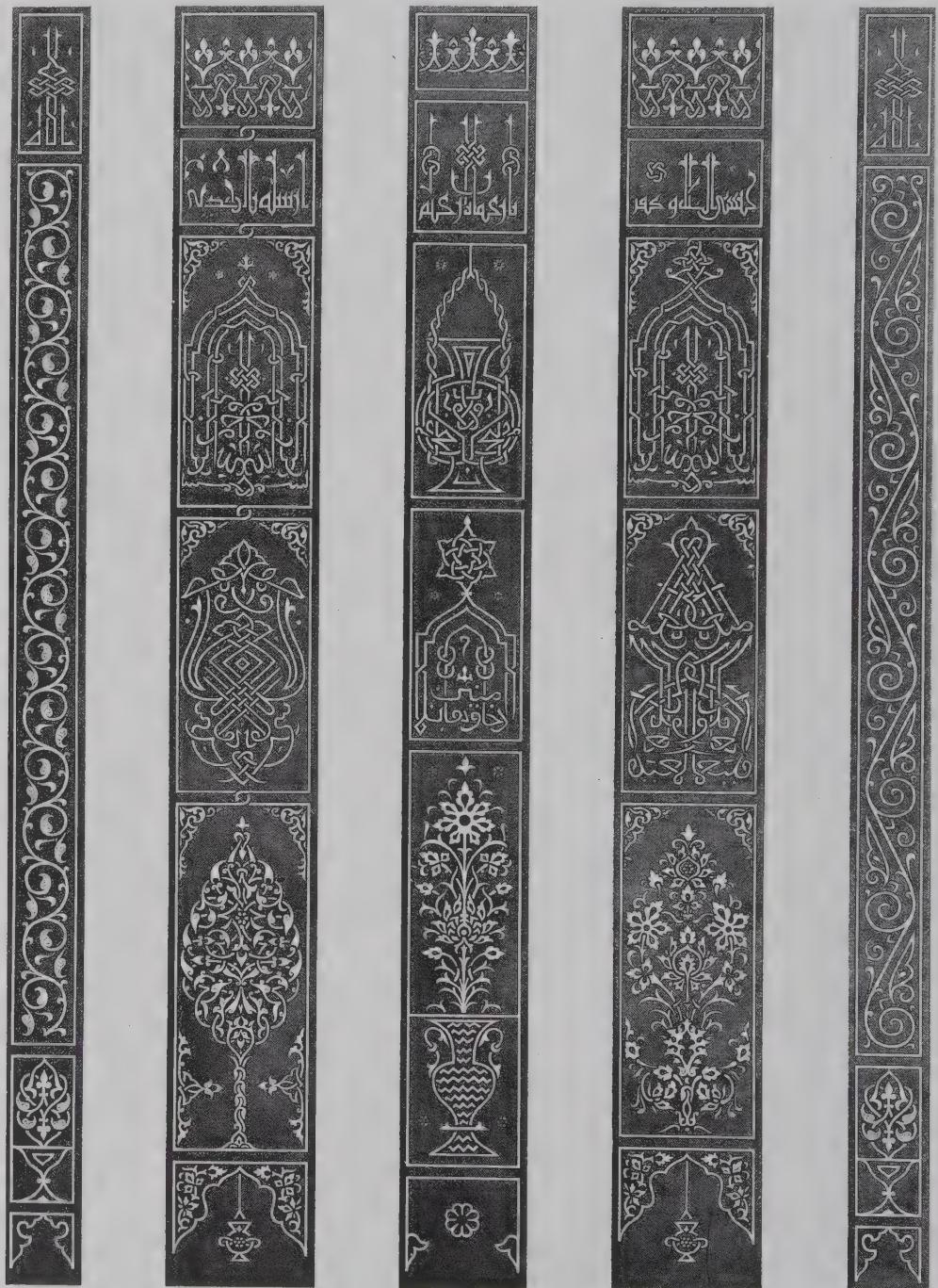
Prisse discusses how Islamic geometric patterns evolved out of practical experiments with Platonic ideas of perfect proportions grounded in Euclidean geometry.

Mosaics, fragments of various walls & floors, 15th-16th centuries



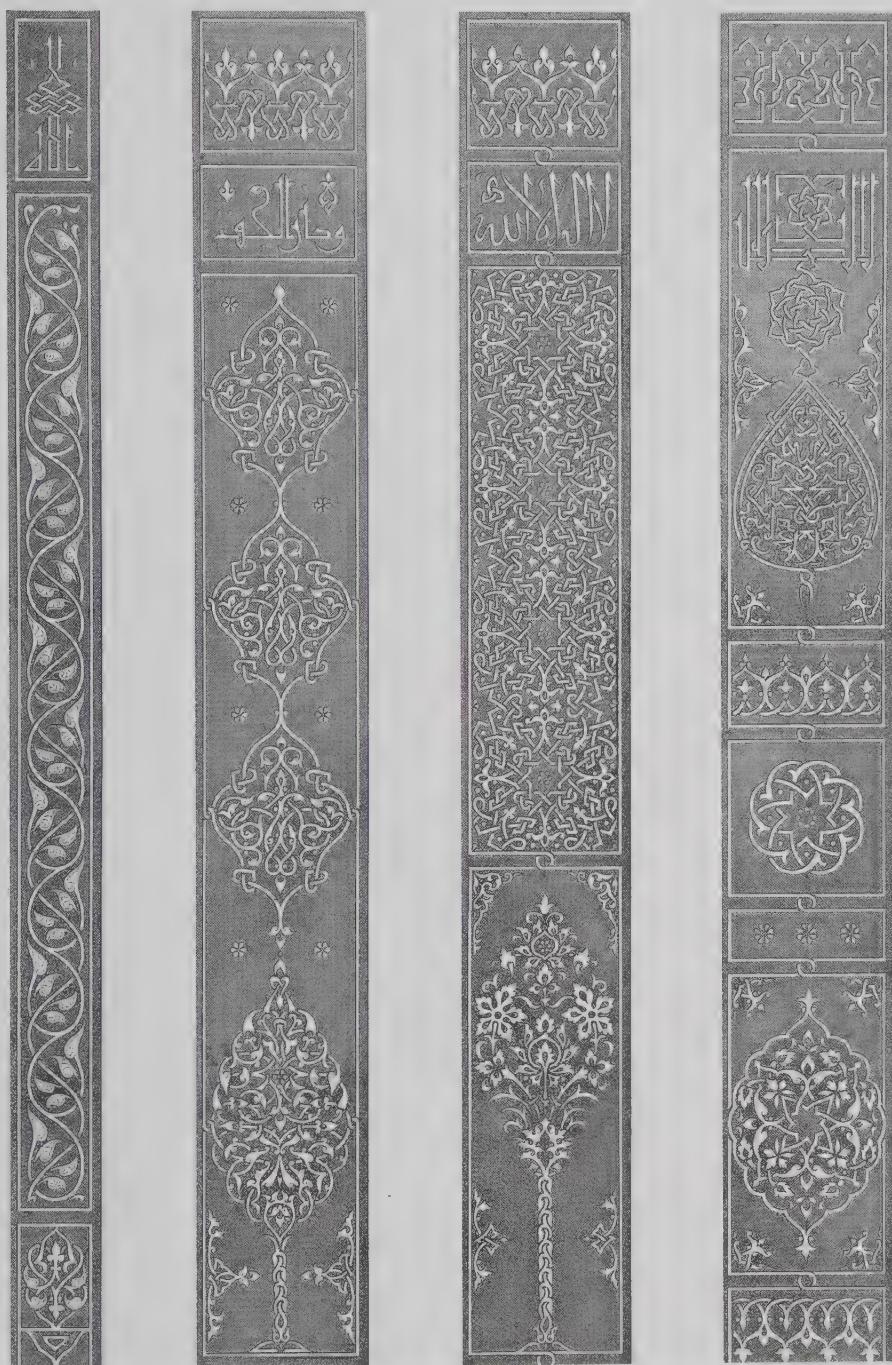
Mausoleum of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, marble panel, 16th century

This marble panel in al-Ghuri's mausoleum, located across from his madrasa-mosque complex, marks the near end of the Mamluke dynasty. The mausoleum is a significant legacy of al-Ghuri, although after he died fighting the Ottoman Turks outside Aleppo, his body was never found.



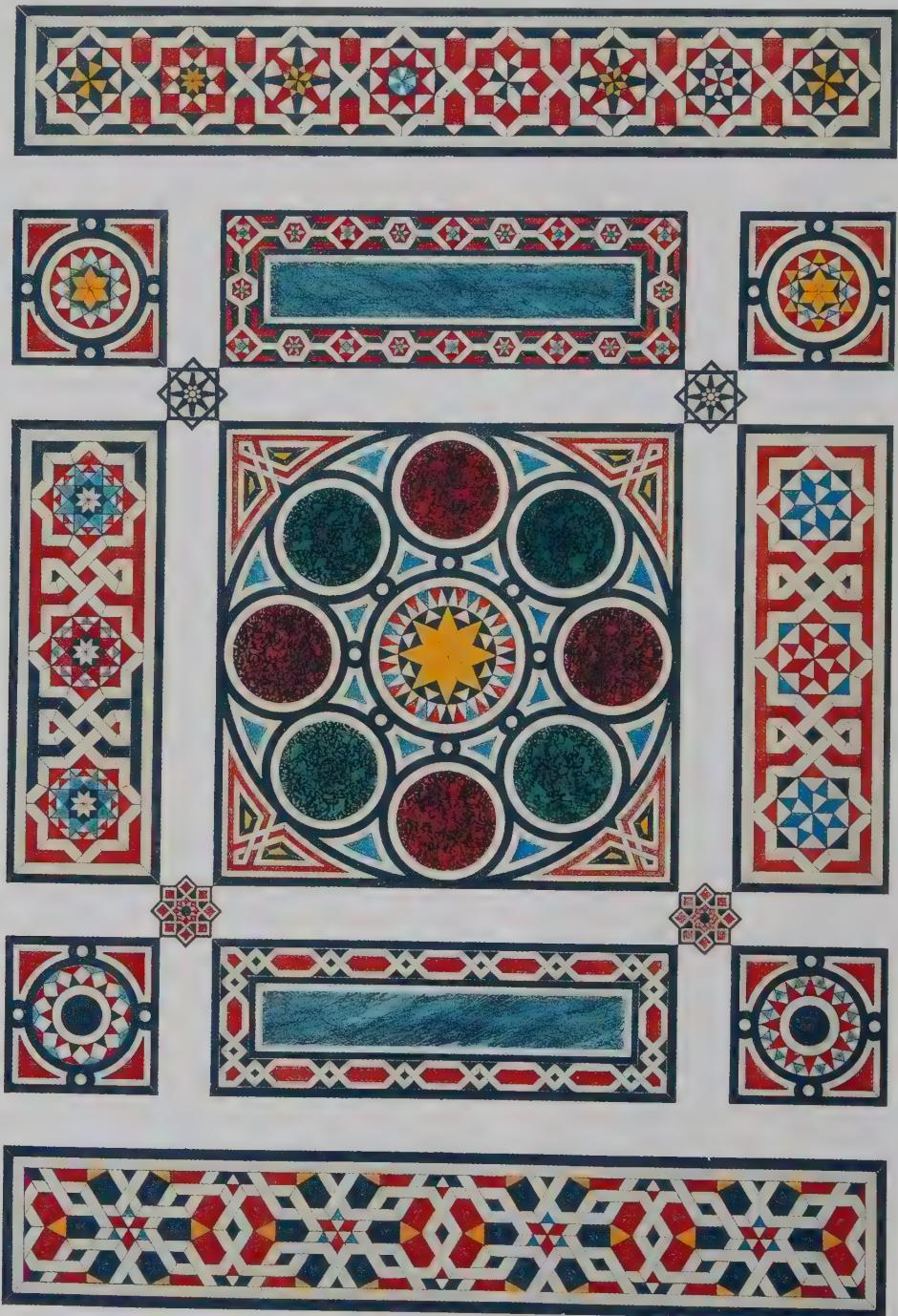
A more detailed look at the panels in Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri's mausoleum uncovers symbols like the oil lamp and flowering bush evoking images of paradise. The treatment of marble integrates calligraphy and arabesques, emphasizing their common aesthetic basis.

Mausoleum of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, details of panels, 16th century



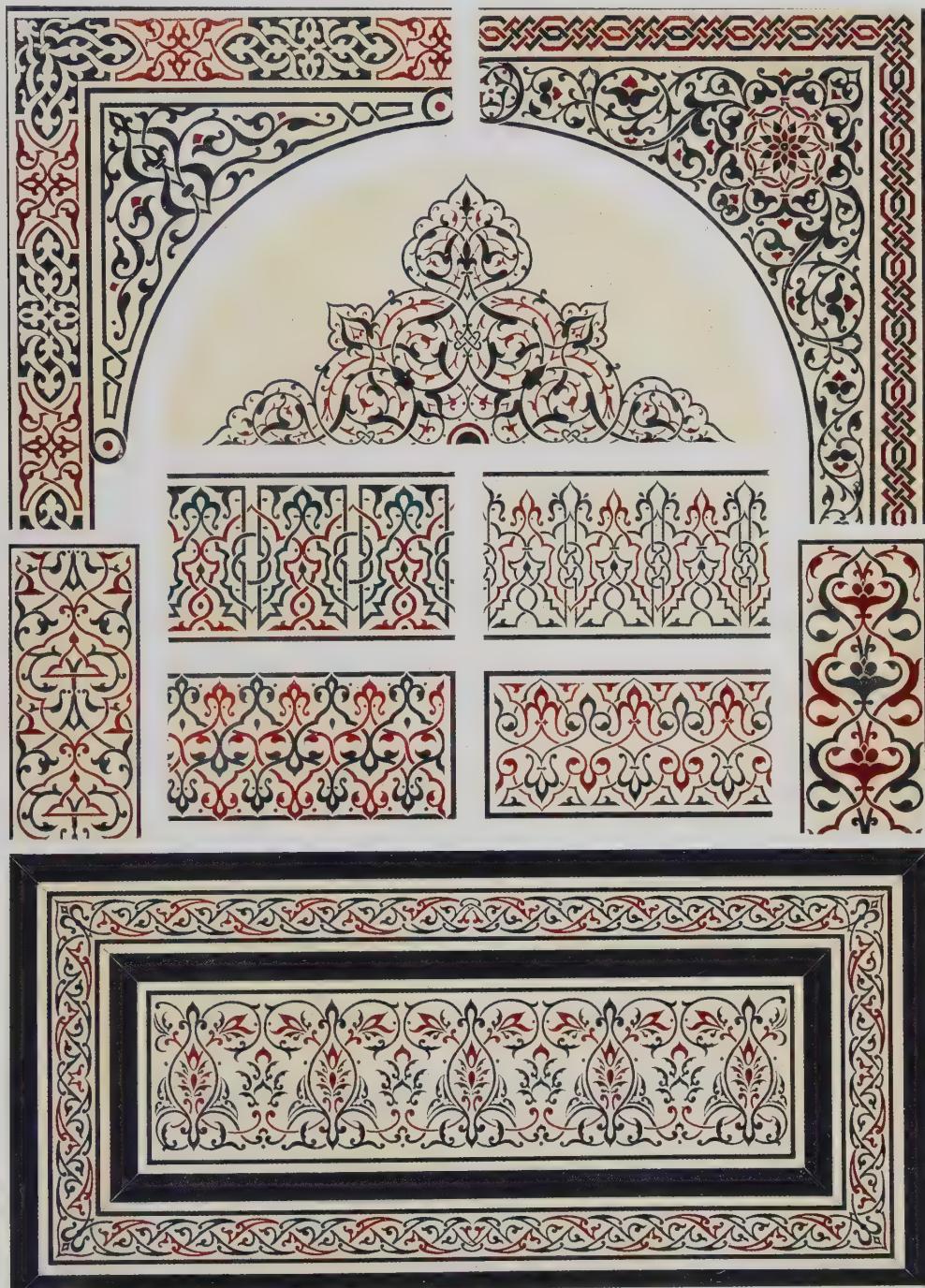
Mausoleum of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, details of panels, 16th century

The marble panels of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri's mausoleum stretch from the marble wainscoting to just below the base of the dome. The overall look bears similarities to brocade.



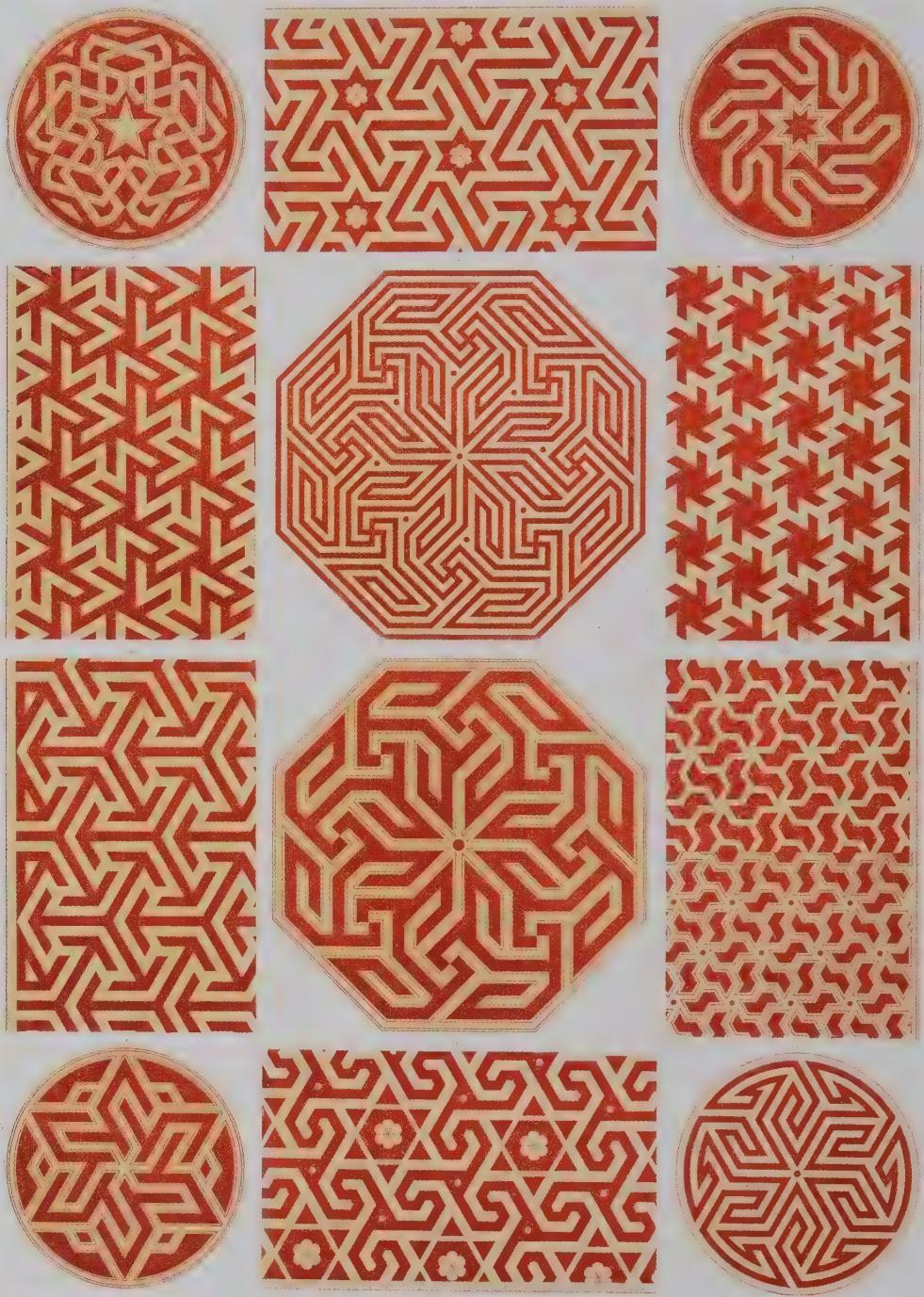
Floor mosaic fragments laid out in the durkah embrace predominant square and circle patterns symbolic of earthly elements and the arctic points of the compass. The arrangement is grounded by the lower panel's isometric tessellation design. A Durkah, a recessed area in the mandara, never carpeted, was used to deposit shoes.

Floor mosaics, fragments from the plan of a durkah, 16th-18th centuries



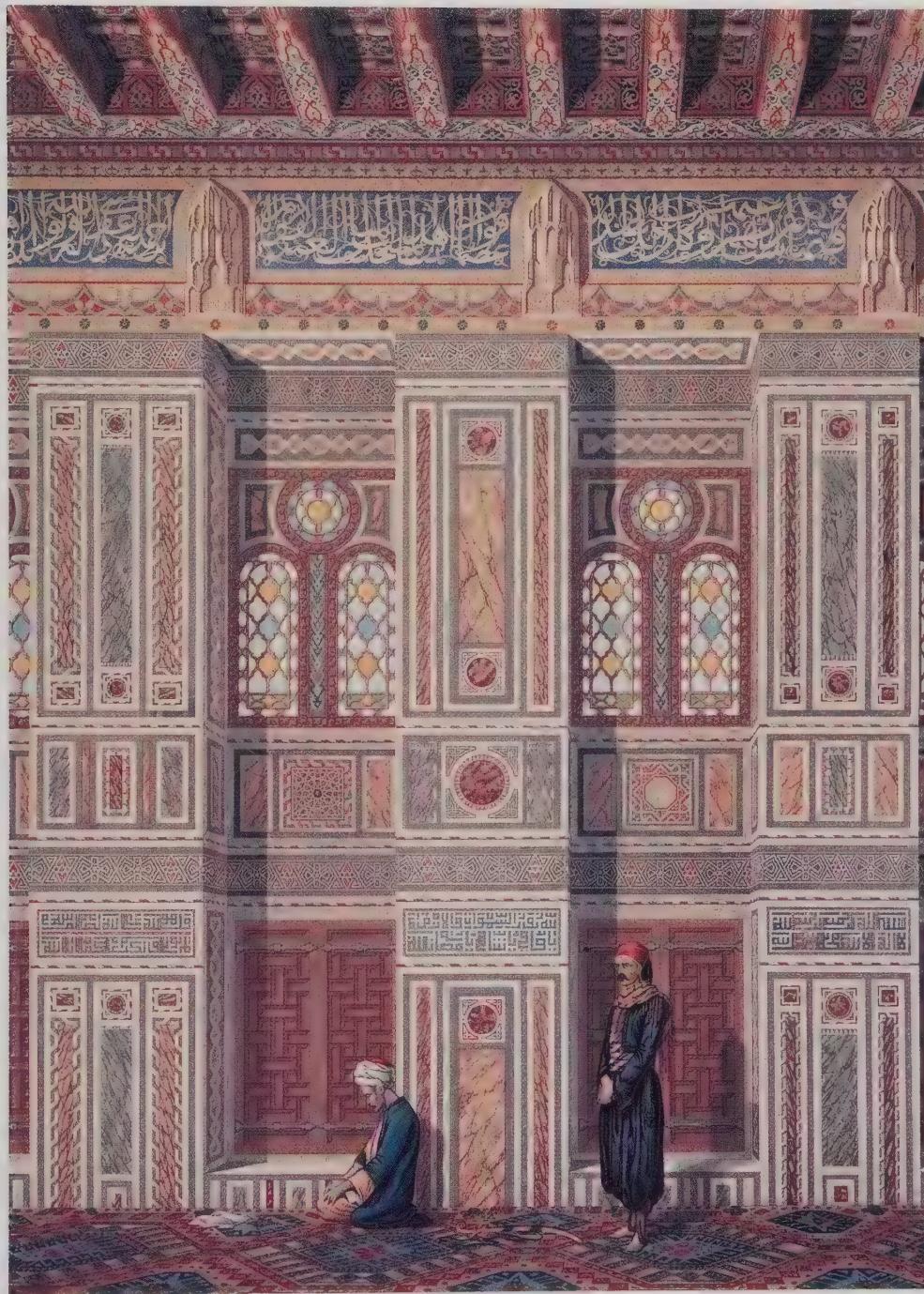
Stucco inlaid on white marble, 16th-18th centuries

Fragments of delicate stucco relief inlaid on white marble contrast sharply with the geometric patterns often employed over vast surfaces. This design is similar to pietra-dura, popular contemporaneously in Florentine and Mughal Indian objects and architectural decoration.



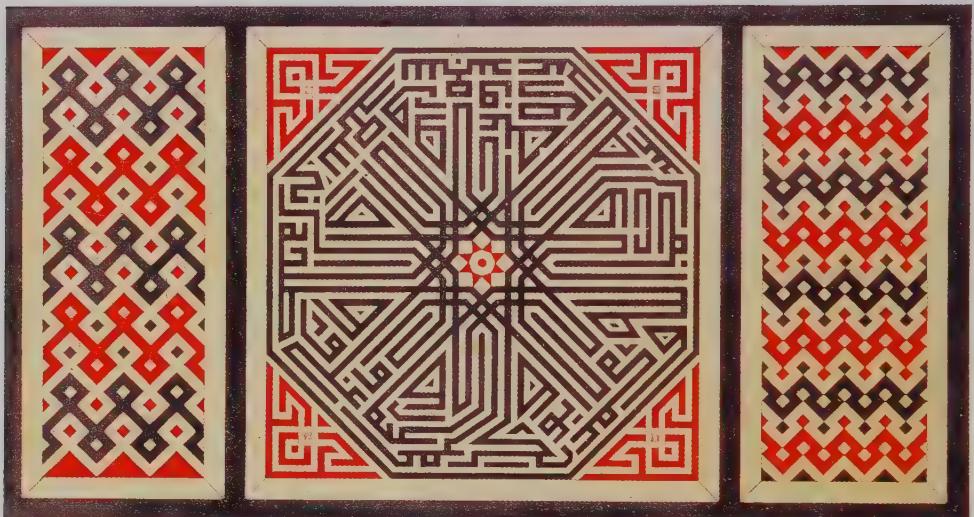
These examples of inlaid stucco on stone illustrate how spinning motifs found within circles, rectangles, and octagons can be varied. Inverse and reciprocal design patterns are integral to the evolution of Islamic geometric ornamentation.

Stucco inlaid on stone, 16th-18th centuries



Mosque of al-Burdayni, interior of the main hall, 17th century

Prisse, an admirer of Mamluke forms, explores the mosque of Shaykh al-Burdayni, where prevailing Ottoman architectural traditions had been rejected in favor of revived lavish Mamluke styles, epitomized here by a high marble dado.



Platonic metaphysics, as interpreted in wall mosaics, relies on octagons manipulated into distinct designs that pivot around highly stylized Kufi Quranic inscriptions.



Mosque of al-Burdaiyi, details of wall mosaics, 17th century



Mosque of al-Burdayni, details of wall mosaics, 17th century

Friezes and hangings illustrate how overlapped hexagons forge interweaving paths that can frame small, economical pieces of raw material, a critical factor in areas where wood in long straight pieces was scarce and marble a luxury.



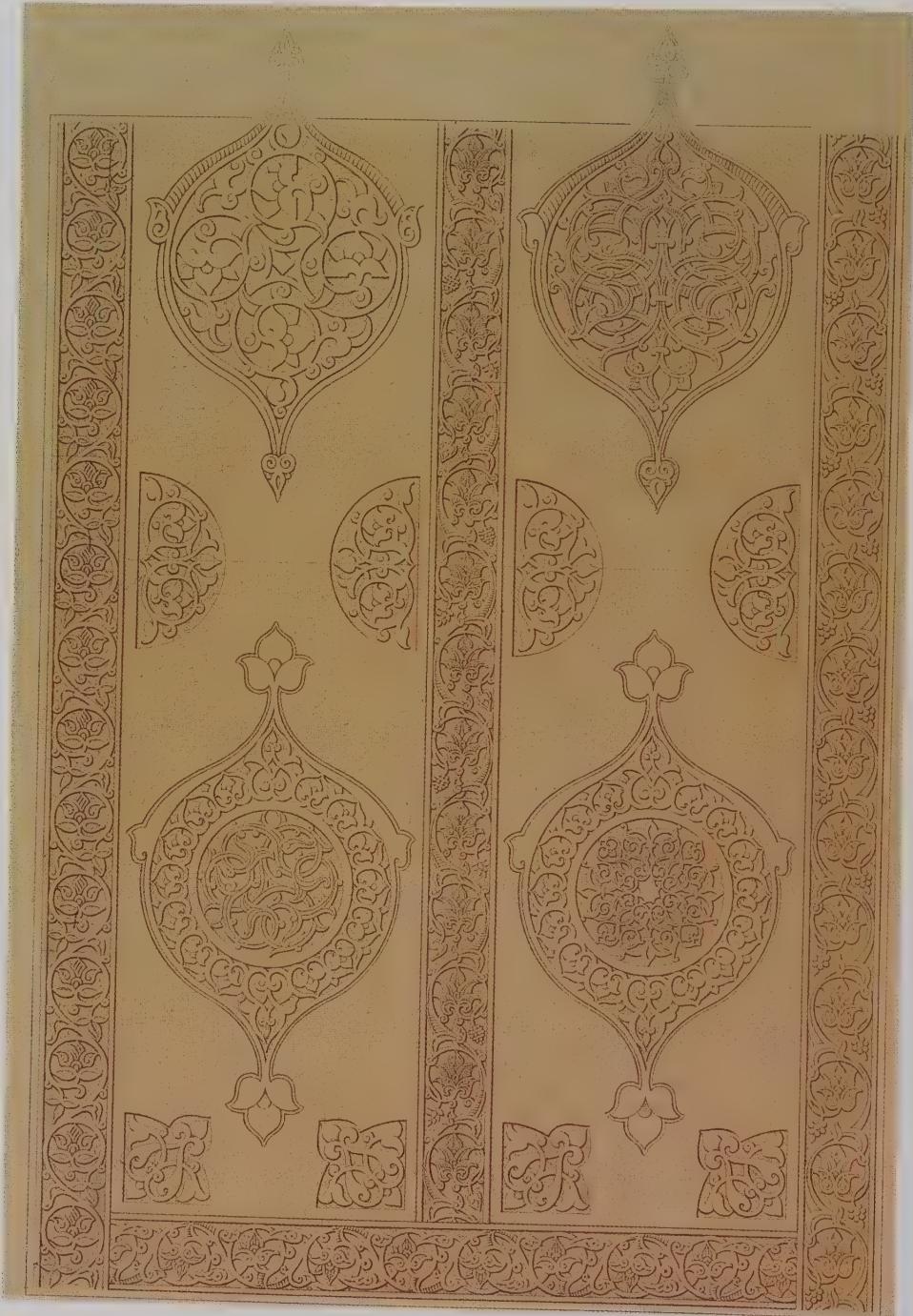
Revived Mamluke traditions of decoration are captured in the mihrab mosaic in al-Burdayni's mosque. Prisse parallels the texture of the mihrab area, composed of white marble and mother of pearl, with rich glimmering fabric.

Mosque of al-Burdayni, the mihrab mosaic, 17th century



Madrasa & mausoleum of Emir Sarghitmish, details of the tomb, 14th century

This gloriously carved marble—attributed by Prisse to an unknown Qawam al-Din and now kept at the Islamic Museum in Cairo—was located in the madrasa of Emir Sarghitmish (1356). The Persian character of the marble's low relief and fluid Quranic inscription would have provided a familiar environment for its Persian students, who studied the Hanafi rite.



The peculiarly delicate decoration of the white marble floor, evocative of filigree designs, is an unusual transfer of decoration from metalwork to flooring. Although Prisse suggests the structure is a token monument of the struggle against the Crusaders, it seems to reflect typically Persian designs.

Madrasa & mausoleum of Emir Sarghitmish, white marble floors, 14th century



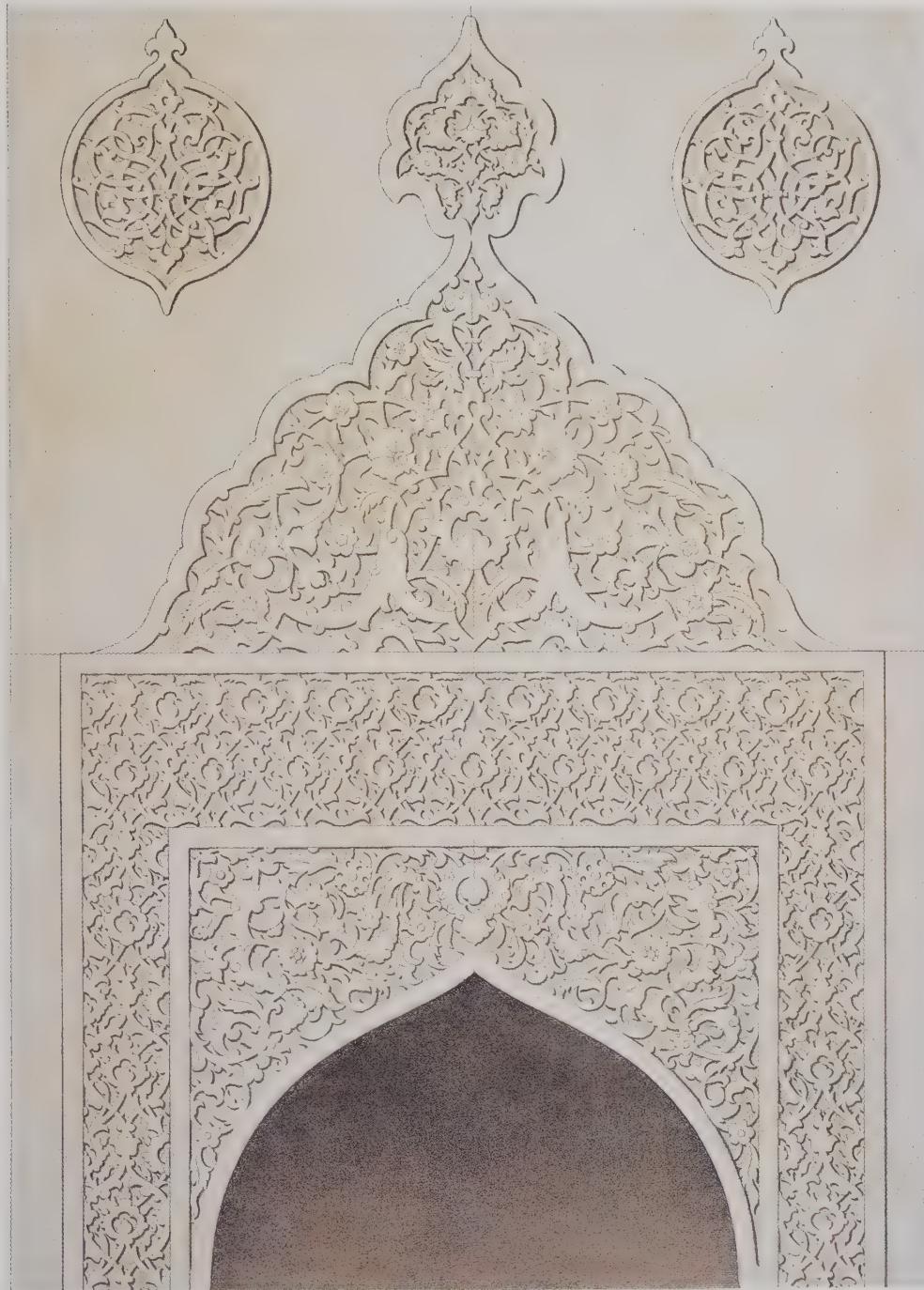
Madrasa & mausoleum of Emir Sarghitmish, marble frieze and rosette, 14th century

The marble frieze and rosette reveal quintessential Mamluke patterns. A hexagon is encompassed by circles but the usually linear pattern is elaborated in intricately carved leafy arabesques.

This highly unusual marble panel bears an extremely stylized vegetal design that supports birds and grapes all within a graceful arabesque frame. This merger of Arab and Persian motifs raises questions about the patron's ethnic affiliations.



Madrasa & mausoleum of Emir Sarghitmish, marble panel, 14th century



Entrance to an 18th-century tomb near Sulayman Pasha

Carved marble decoration surmounting the arched entrance to a tomb is reflective of changing times. It was built during the Ottoman period, its designs similar to those of the Qawam al-Din complex. The spandrel is adorned with marble sculpted in decorative arabesques and medallions to establish a balance.



Mosque of al-Burdayni, ceiling and frieze, 17th century



Mosque of al-Burdayni, details of the great ceiling, 17th century

This section of the ceiling displays an approach that required luxurious raw materials and supreme craftsmanship. Prisse is amazed by the decorative scheme, which is drawn and colored in the same style as a manuscript frontispiece.



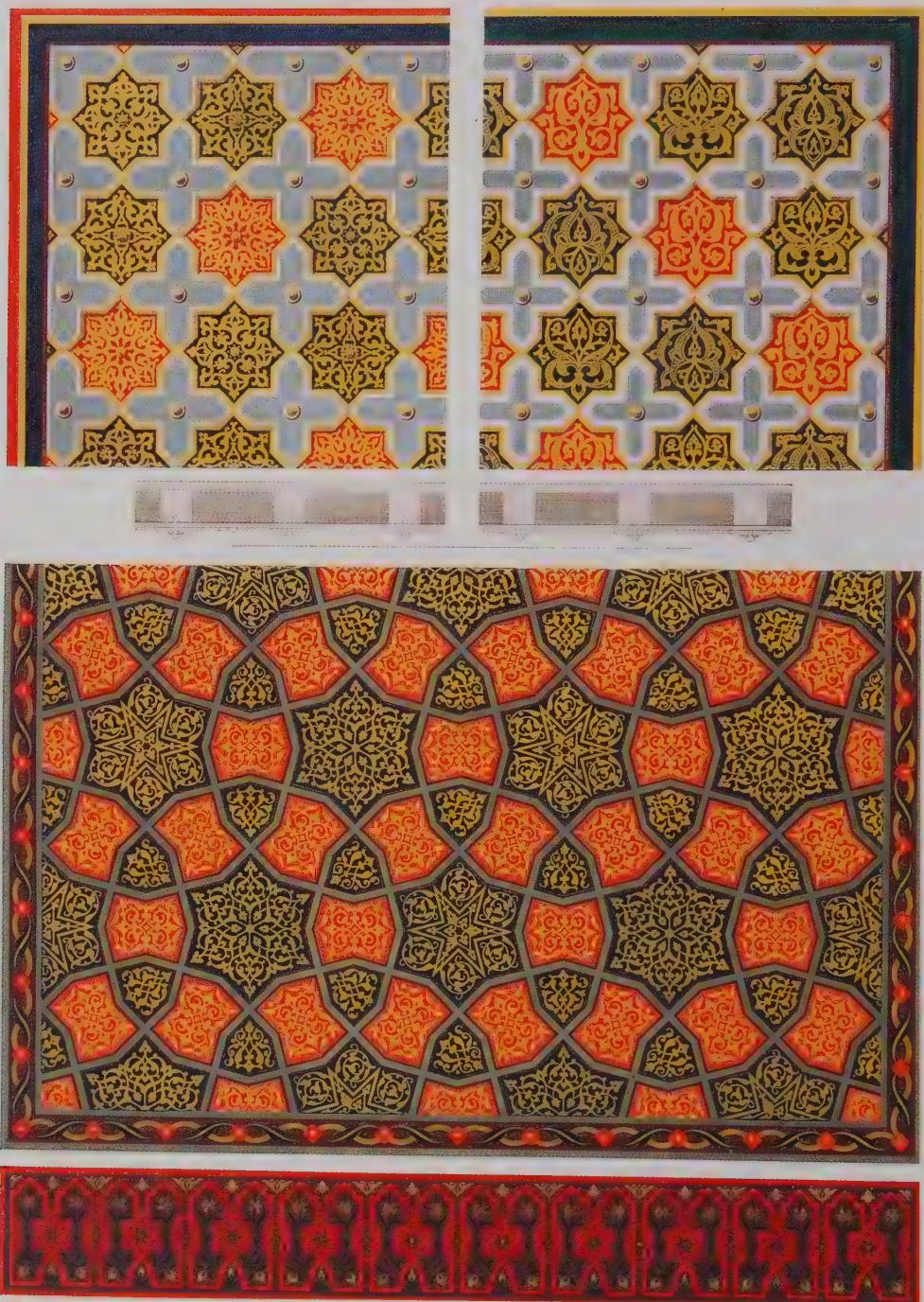
The friezes and hangings in the small rooms of al-Burdaiyi's mosque incorporate octagon-based designs molded around a floral motif. This unravels giving way to stems that are interlaced with mirror-image counterparts. Arrows direct the eye to alternating rimmed florettes.

Mosque of al-Burdaiyi, ceiling arabesques, 17th century



Mosque of al-Burdayni, arabesques on the ceilings, 17th century

Arabesques on the ceilings of the small rooms in al-Burdayni's mosque resemble bouquet designs found in ancient Egyptian Theban tomb paintings, but reject the central ankh-shaped staff, symbol of life, in favor of a seemingly unending maze of leafy vines.



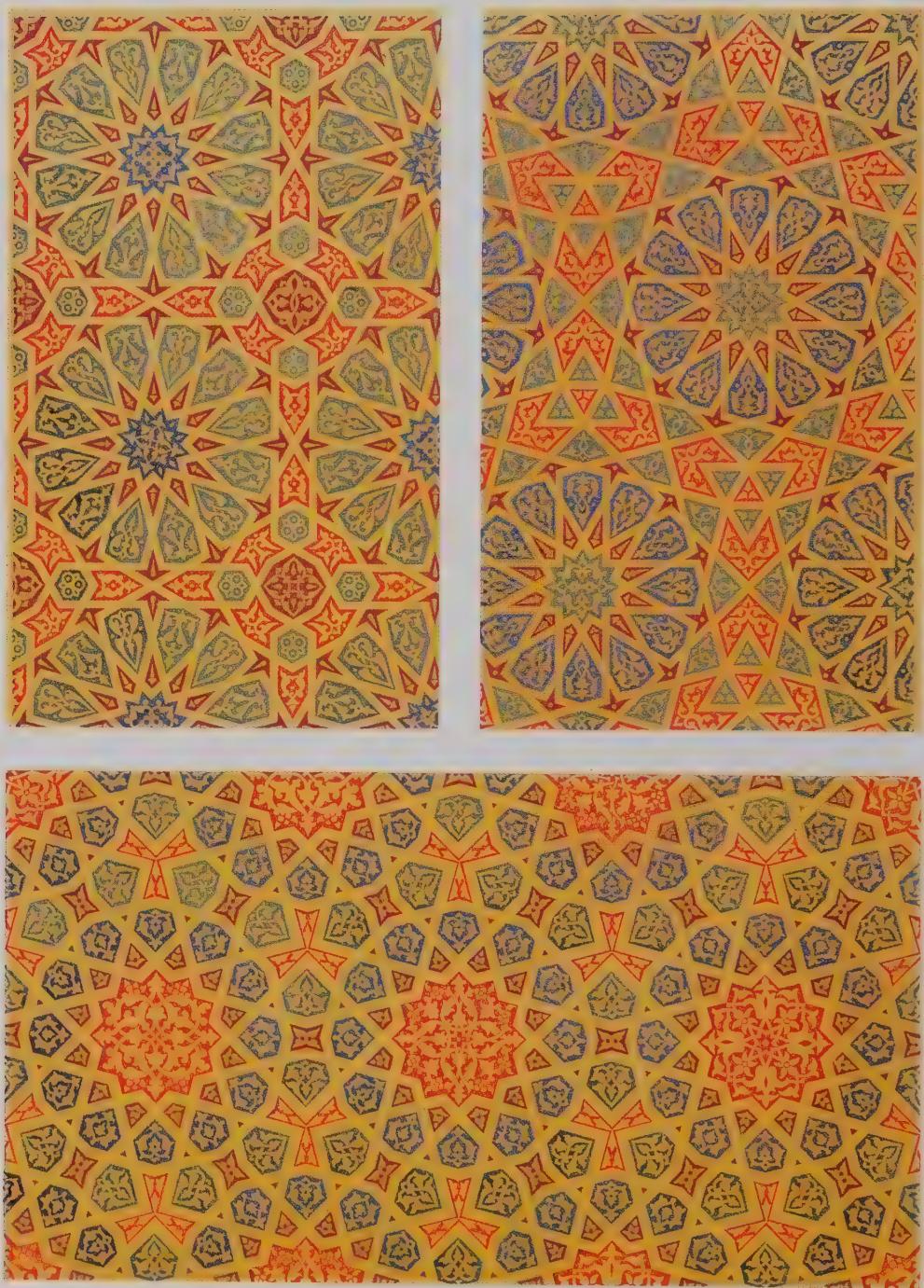
Bayt al-Shalabi, ceilings, 18th century



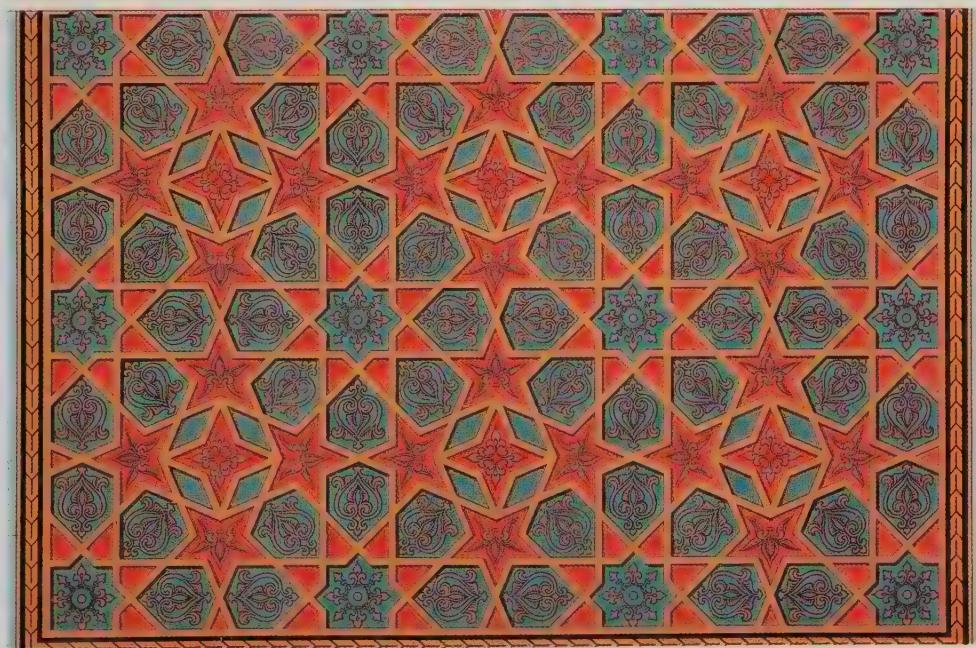
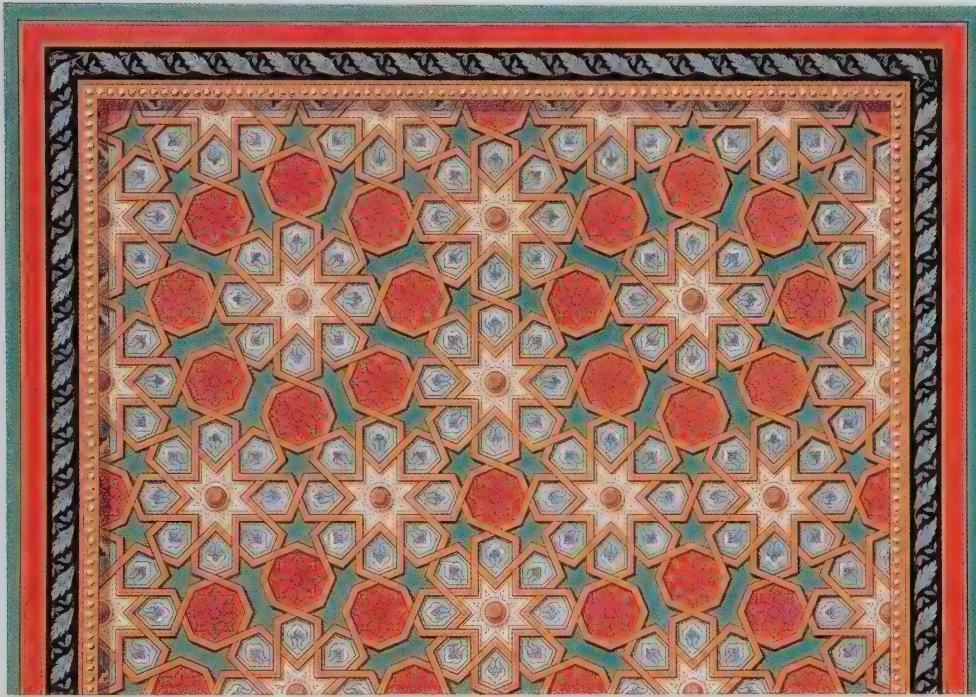
Mauresque ceiling, 18th century

This unknown ceiling displays a carpet-like motif of interlinking hexagons framed by three planes of arabesques. To fix the ceiling-planks to the joists, small tongues were attached. These fixtures assumed different shapes, and were adorned with painted or gilded arabesques.

Ceilings composed of dodecagonal stars offer another example of geometry's role in woodcarving. Various designs emerge from the woodwork. Aspects of the formation are articulated by coloring in different segments of carved floral patterns.

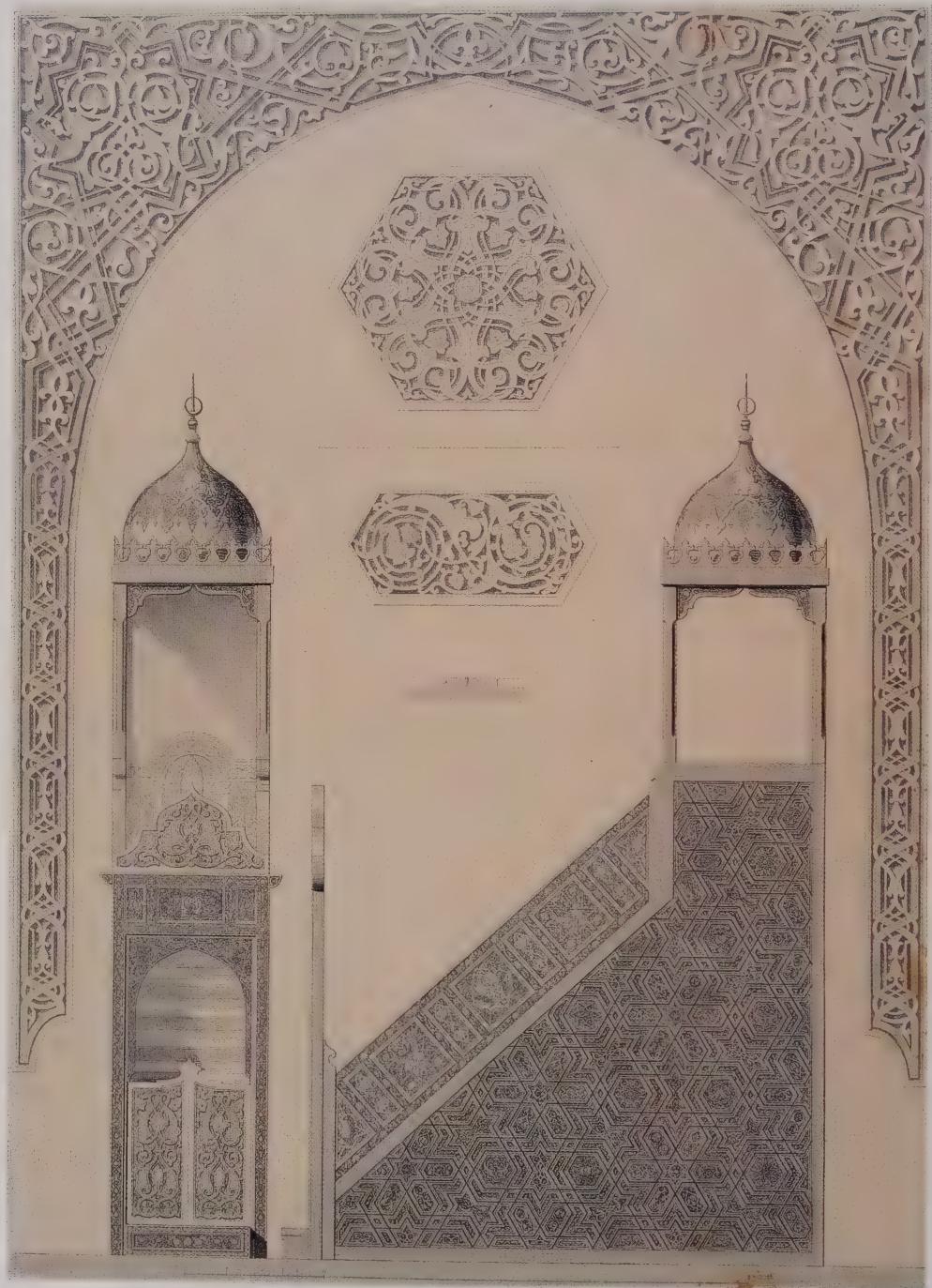


Examples of ceilings with dodecagonal stars



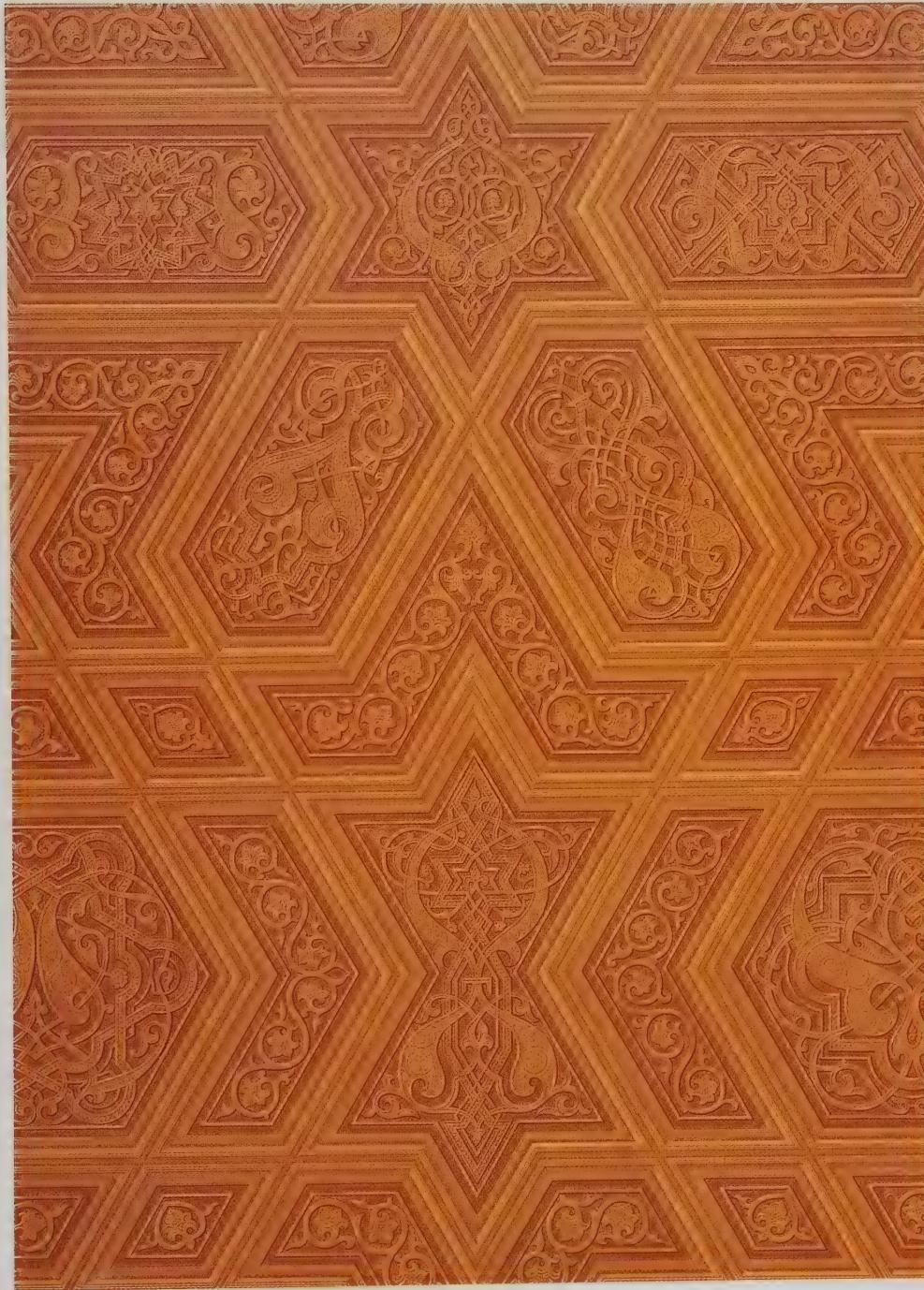
Examples of ceiling with octagonal stars

These ceilings, featuring octagonal stars, serve to contrast the impact of virtually unadulterated carved wood with that of a painted carved wood surface. The ornate upper ceiling panel, framed by a layer of carved leaves and nubs, displays an aesthetic quite unlike the austere one below.



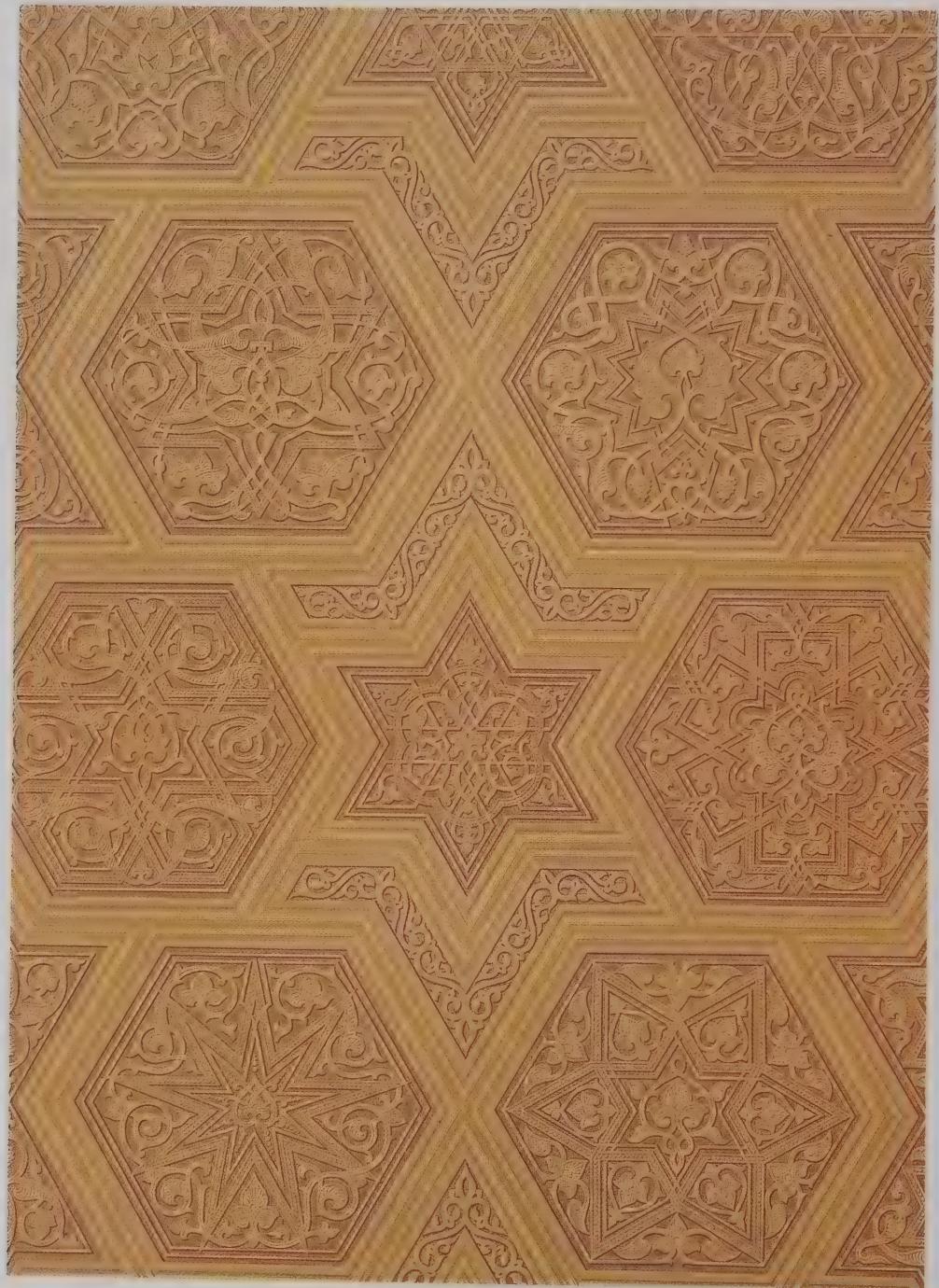
The congregational mosque of Qus featured a magnificent minbar that is said to have been constructed by order of Emir Tala'i Abu Rezik. Qus, a town in Upper Egypt, served for some time as a seat of the Abbasid caliphate.

Mosque of Qus, ensemble & details of the minbar, 12th century



Mosque of Qus, detail of the minbar, 12th century

The minbar in the mosque of Qus adhered to Ayyubid forms and designs. Unlike later minbars, it has no side door. Moreover, as captured in this section and detail, the minbar's carvings are characteristically Syrian.



Small, delicately carved geometric patterns in this assemblage of minbar decorations are similar to those found in the minbar of the al-Salih Tala'i mosque, established in Cairo by the same patron. The designs typify prevailing Syrian-influenced aesthetic sensibilities.

Mosque of Qus, detail of the minbar, 12th century



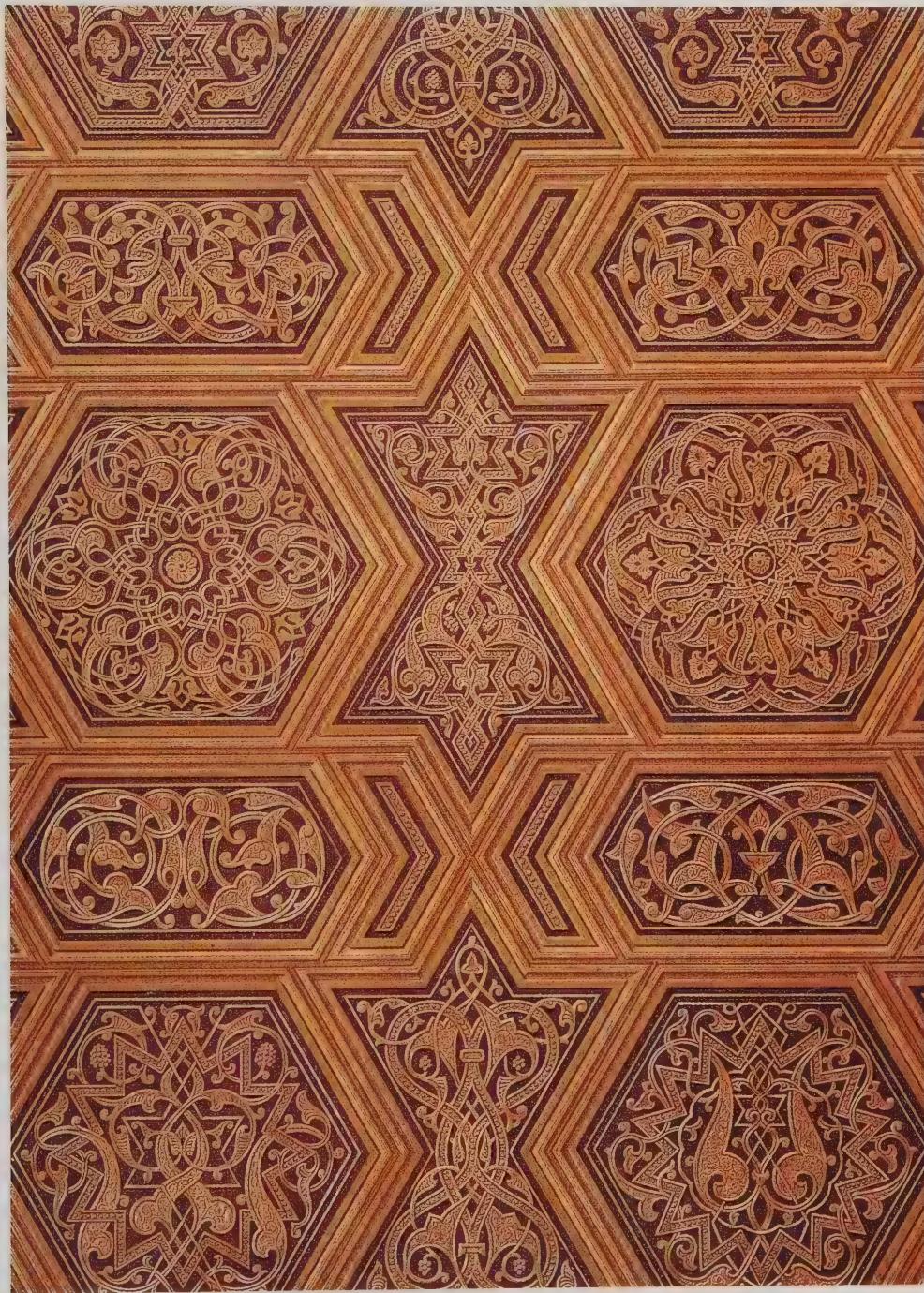
Mosque of Qus, details of minbar woodwork, 12th century

The arabesques illustrated in these details of woodwork are controlled by underlying geometric formations. The six-pointed star plays a critical role in the composition, serving as a visual anchor for the arabesques.

Prisse's presumed arrangement of design for the door of the minbar of the mosque of Qus provides an example of a motif that lacks the six-pointed star. Instead, a pattern is formed by repeating and rotating a hexagonal emblem.



Mosque of Qus, door of the minbar, reconstruction, 12th century



Mosque of Qus, arbitrary assemblage of details from the minbar, 12th century

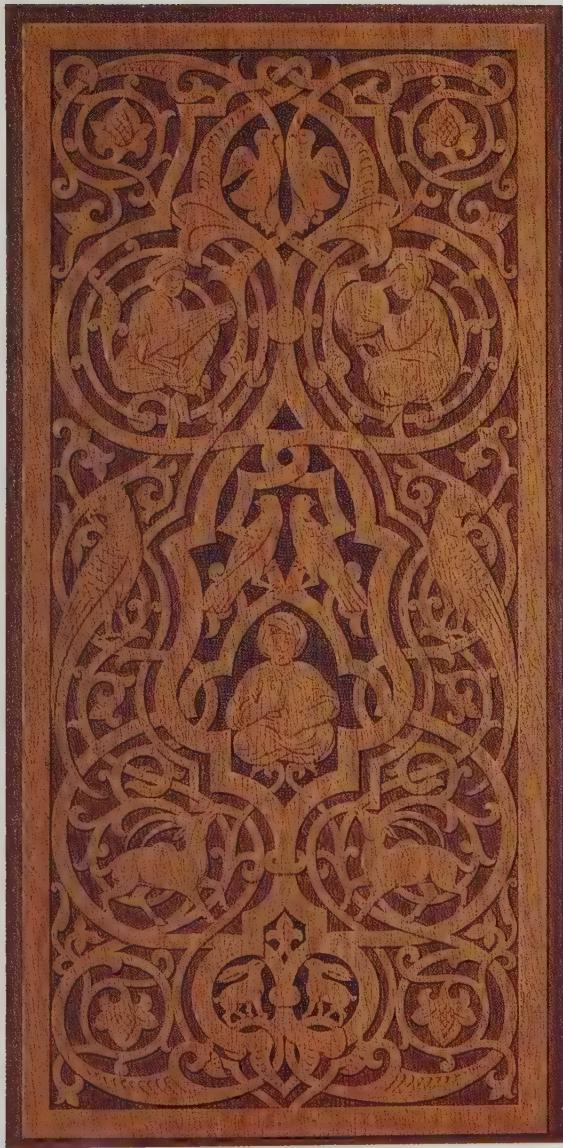
The beauty of the carved geometric-pattered minbar, captured in this arbitrary assemblage of decoration, came to be a standard feature in mosques. This type of design is clearly distinct from the later style of minbar composed of criss-crossed rods and spindles of turned wood.



These details of the minbar relay the majesty of the piece's design. It is intriguing that this minbar was eventually moved from Upper Egypt to the mosque of Ibn Tulun, given that another could surely have been commissioned in Cairo.

Mosque of Qus, details of the minbar, arbitrary coloring, 12th century

Details of beams and friezes from a muristan, or hospital, display animals, fantastical and realistic, perched in elaborate arabesques. This belies the common assertion that artisans had abandoned animistic designs. Prisse interprets the designs as indicative of tolerance for such images in all but religious places.



Muristan of Qalawaun, details of beams and friezes, 13th century



Muristan of Qalawaun, carvings on main interior door, 13th century



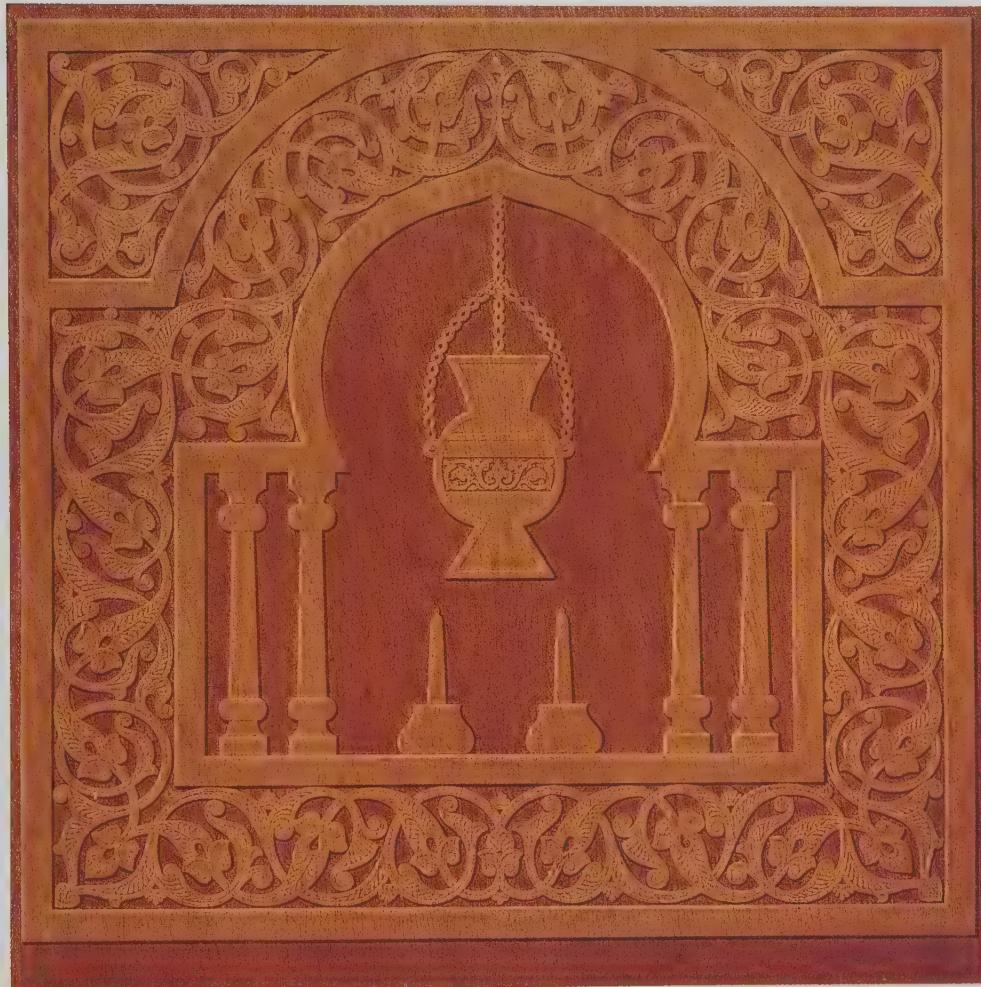
Mosque of al-Nafsi Qaysun, ornamental details of the minbar, 14th century

Emir al-Nafsi Qaysun came to Cairo a free man and sold himself to Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad, who used this opportunity to protect himself against more entrenched Mamlukes who might try to usurp his throne. Details in al-Nafsi's minbar combine angular patterns with arabesques.



These details of the mihrab woodwork bear striking similarities to designs featured in the minbar area. By forging a close association between qibla and pulpit, the designer may have been attempting to elevate the patron's position in popular consciousness.

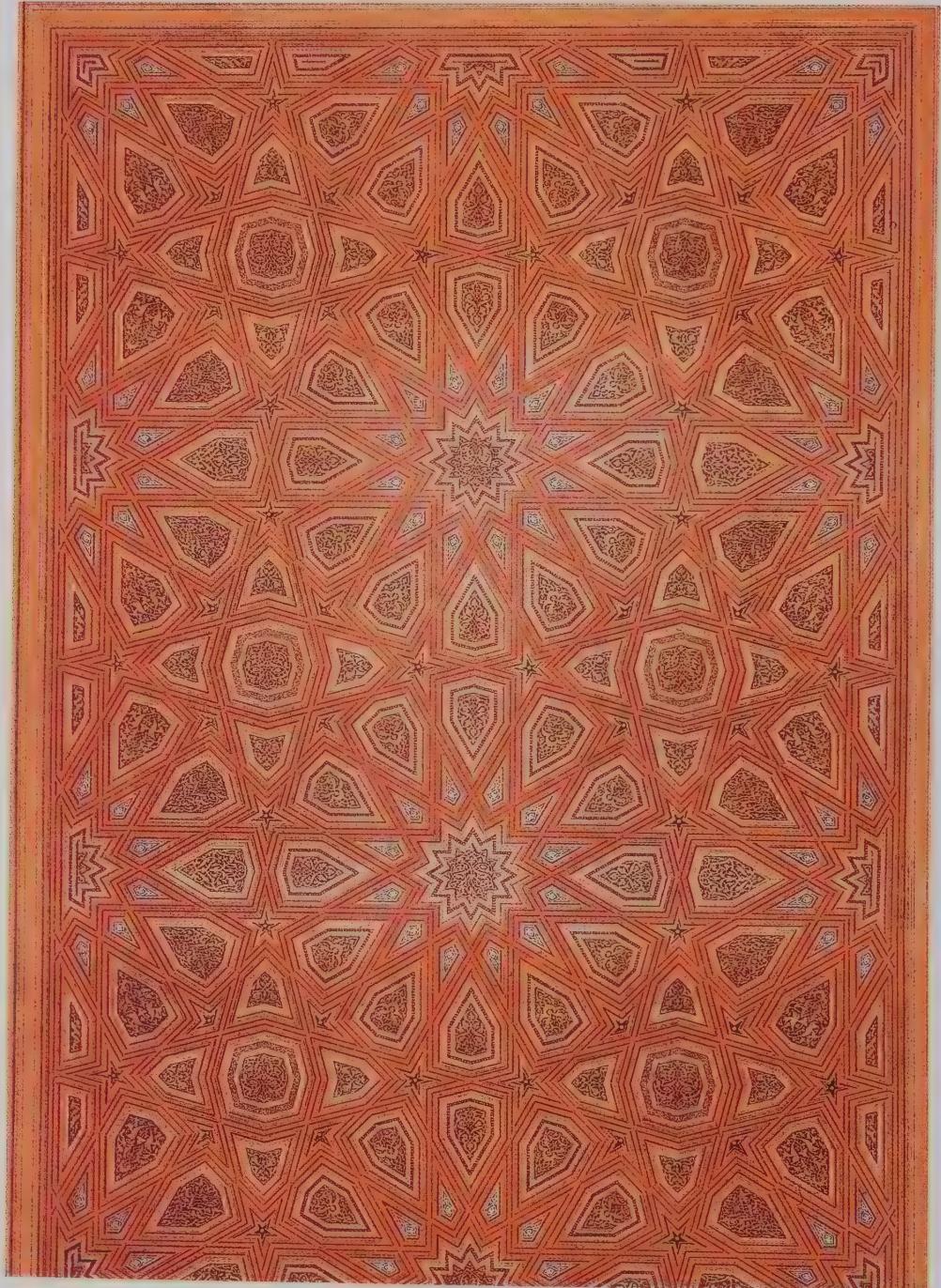
Mosque of al-Nafsi Qaysun, details of mihrab woodwork, 14th century



Details of the minbar demonstrate how purely ornamental features can mirror functional architectural devices. The suspended lamp is framed by a graceful horseshoe arch that is supported by sturdy columns and surrounded by arabesques.



Mosque of al-Nafsi Qaysun, details of minbar decoration, 14th century



Given the eclectic array of designs incorporated into the mosque of al-Nafsi Qaysun, its minbar stands out for its conservatism. The North African influence evident in the angular geometry of this decorative motif raises questions about the impact of migration on local designs.

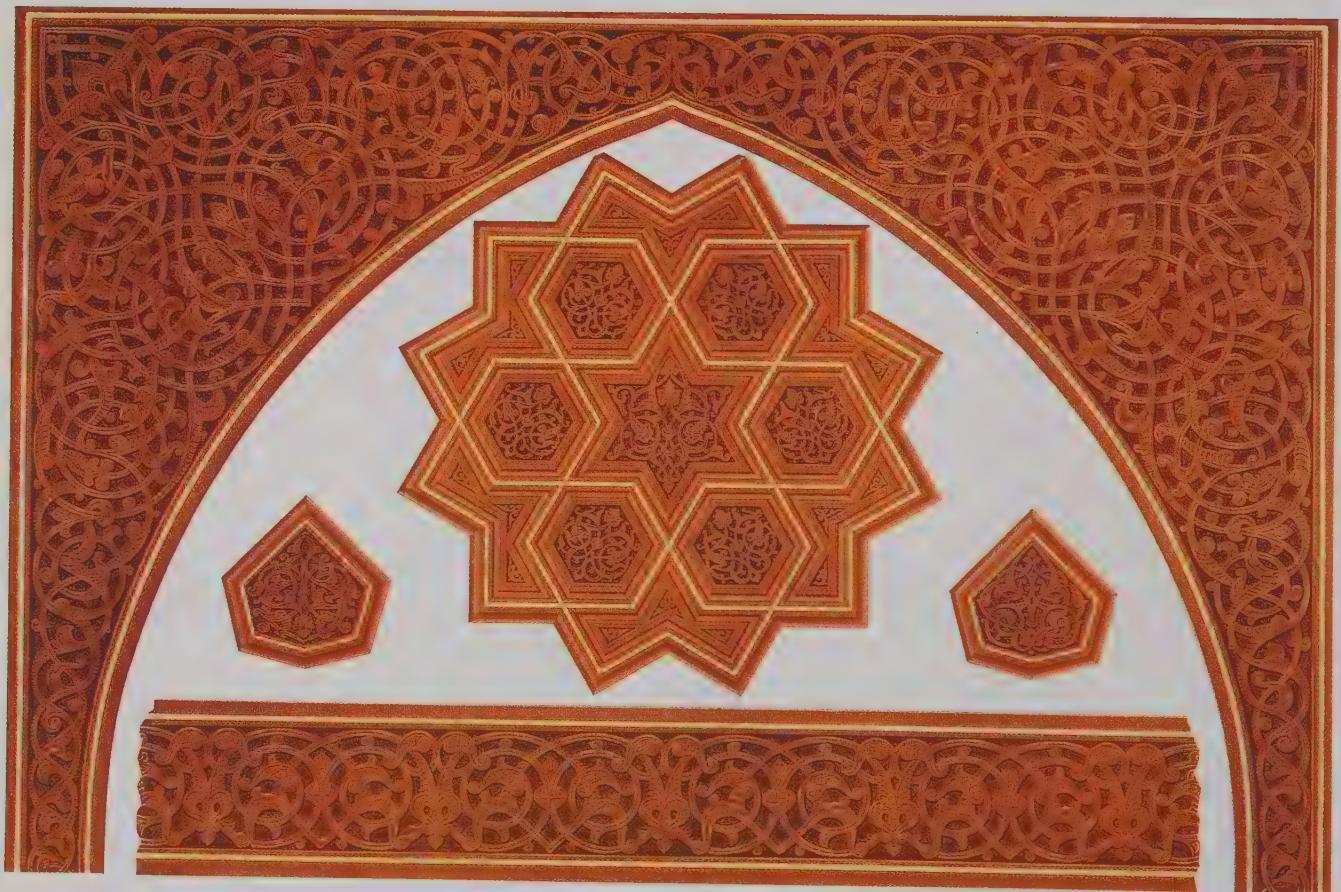
Mosque of al-Nafsi Qaysun, minbar, 14th century



Mosque of Qaitbay, elevation of the minbar door and side view, 15th century

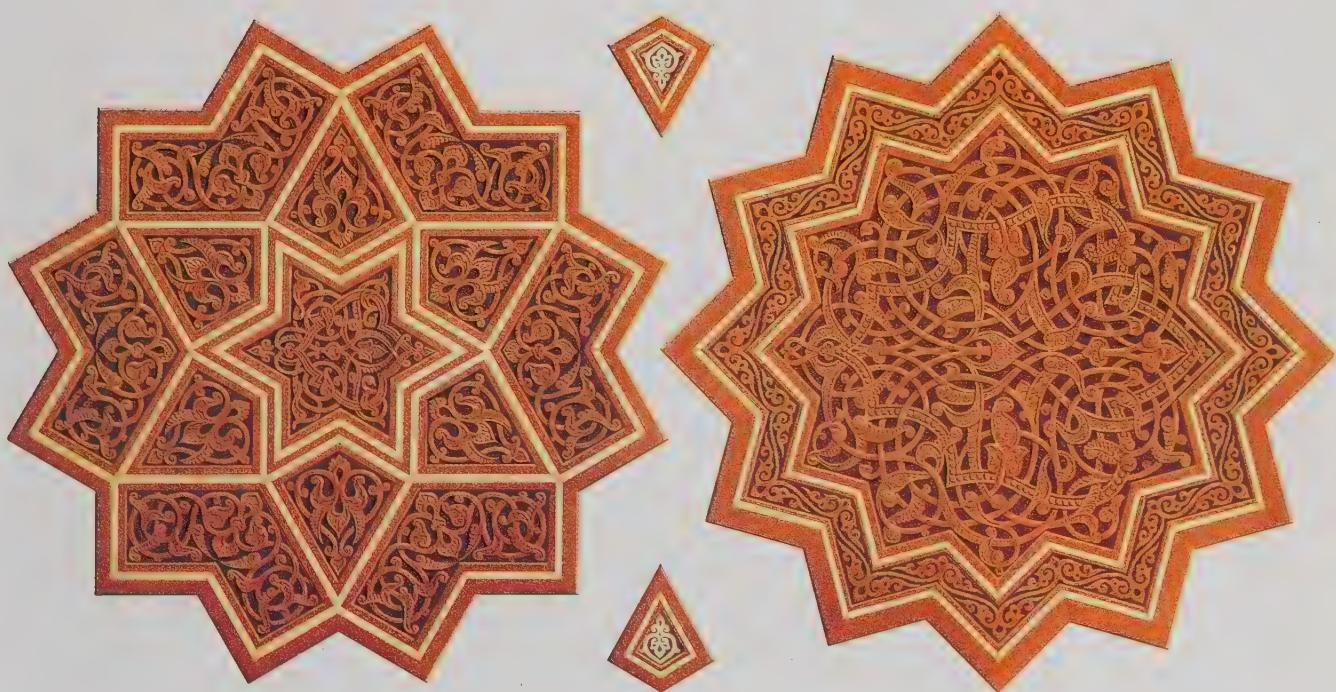
This elevation of the minbar displays clear parallels to the decorative program of the mosque as a whole. The gate is framed by muqarnases and the balcony features a lancet arch. The whole structure is surmounted by a carved onion dome.

Details from the minbar of the mosque of al-Salih Tala'i ibn Rezik are unified by spiraling arabesques. The mosque was designed to house Husayn's head, which had come into the patron's possession after Ascalon fell to the Crusaders, but Caliph al-Faiz demanded the relic remain in his care.

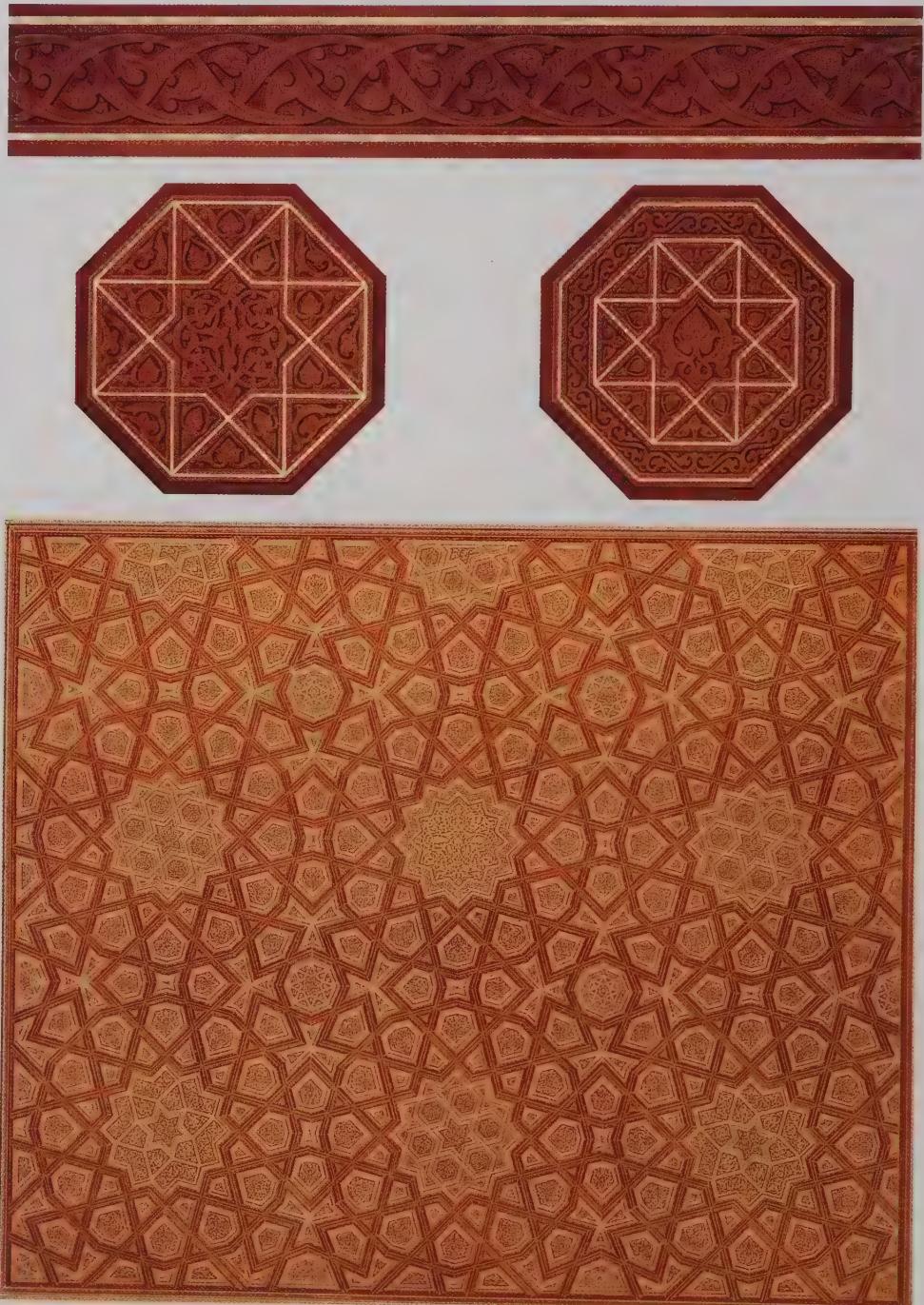


Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i, details of the minbar, 13th century

These details are quite similar to those of its contemporary in Qus. Emir Sayf al-Din Bektimur Gukandar, who commissioned the minbar, had his name inscribed with a note that he had paid for it from his own pocket.

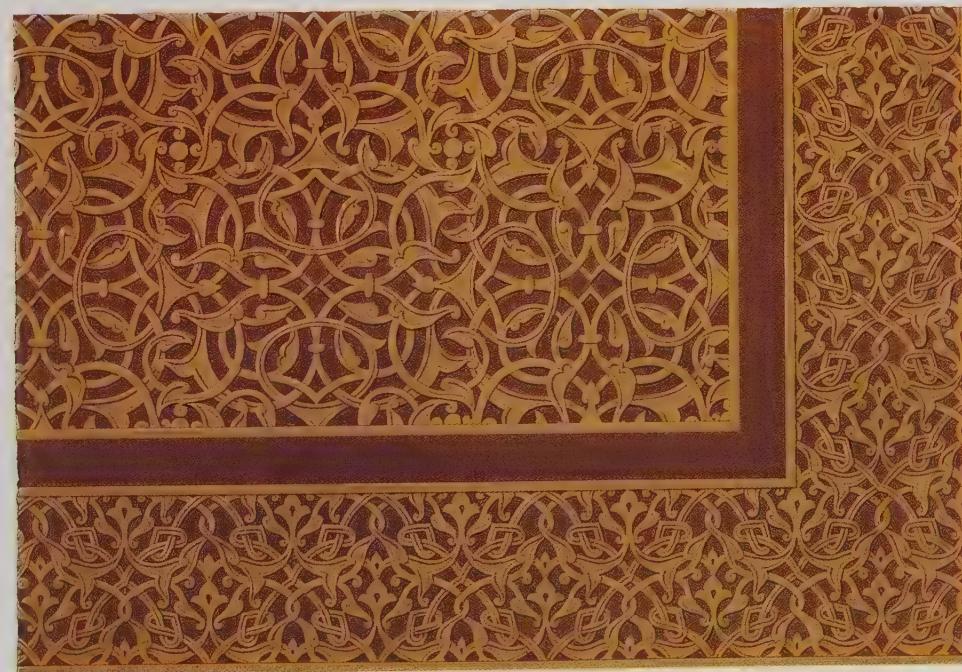
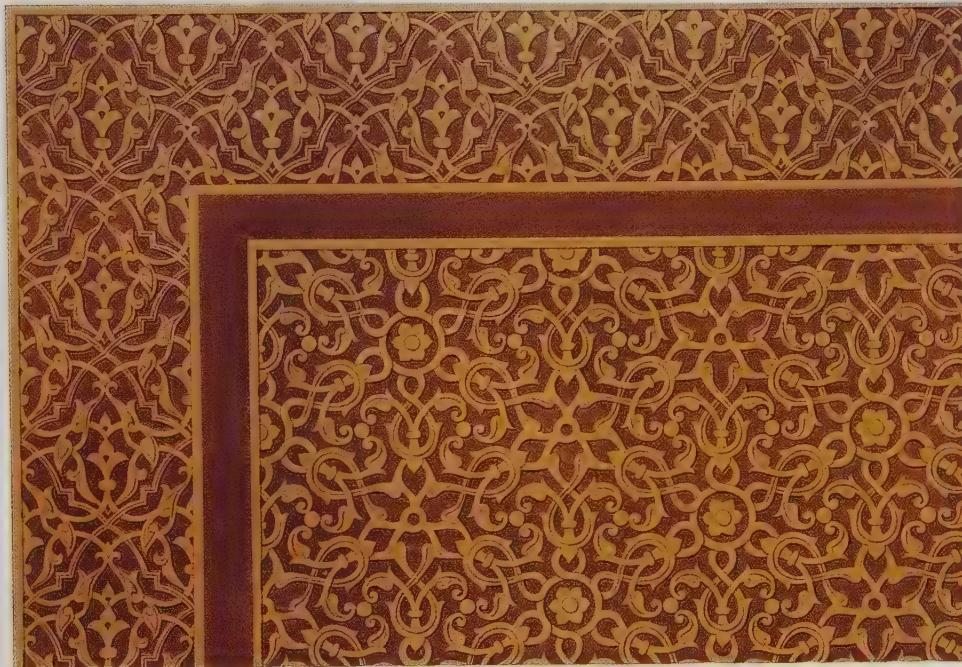


Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i, details of the minbar, 13th century



Articulated geometric patterns in this assemblage of details of the minbar hint at the artist's reluctance to rely on drawings or mathematics. Prisse suggests that perhaps the patron, renowned for his intellect, encouraged artisans to follow their own inclinations.

Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i, assemblage of details from the minbar, 13th century

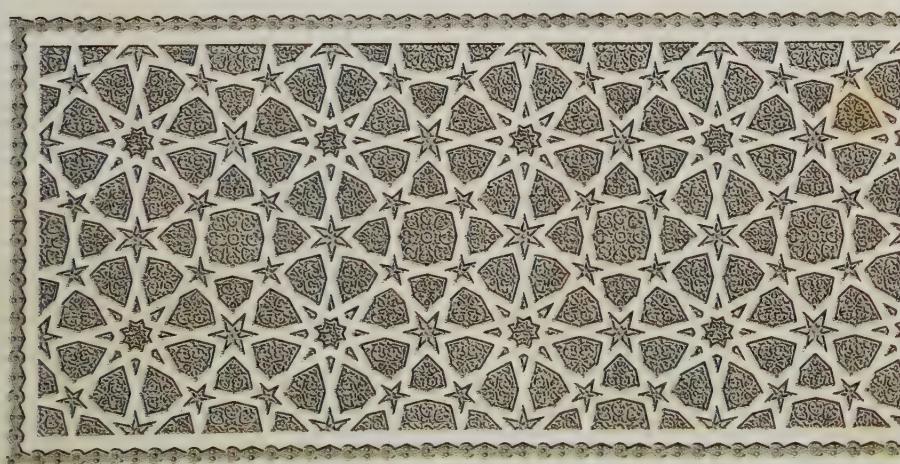
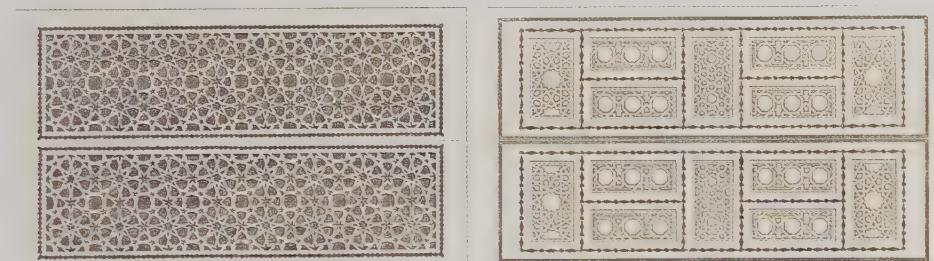


Tomb of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, carved wooden leaves on a cabinet, 16th century

The practical effects of ornament—framing, filling, and linking—are captured in these carved wooden leaves and edging. Prisse encouraged artists on his team to interpret color schemes liberally, in order to articulate how varied a seemingly simple design can be.



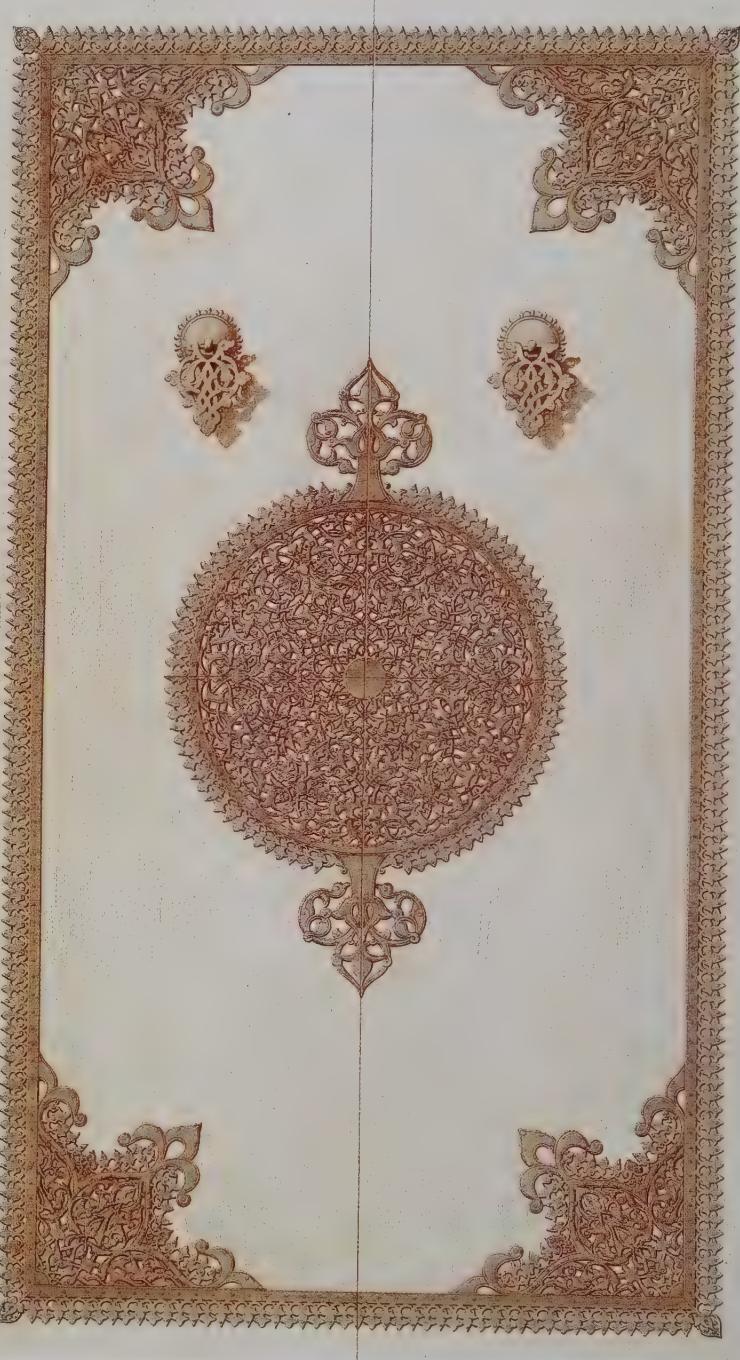
Niches and assembled wooden borders



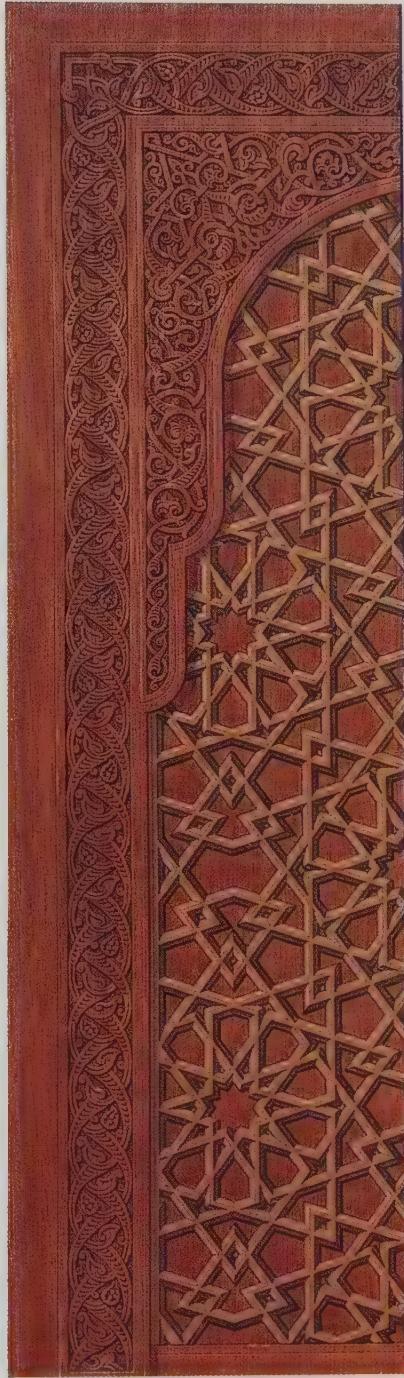
Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i, front & back of main door, 12th century

Although al-Salih Tala'i was denied the privilege of guarding Husayn's head, these details from the front and back of the main door are reminiscent of a Persian 'talar' motif, a permanent reminder of the structure's original function as a reliquary.

The inner door in Sultan Barquq's mosque tells of a time when luxury materials were scarce. Frugal approaches that maximized effect permitted a sparing use of bronze as can be seen with this central bronze medallion framed by quarter medallions at the corners.

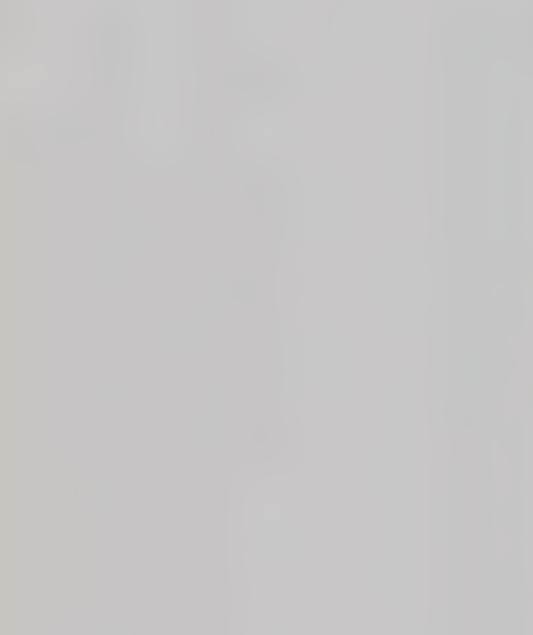


Madrasa of Sultan Barquq, interior door, 14th century

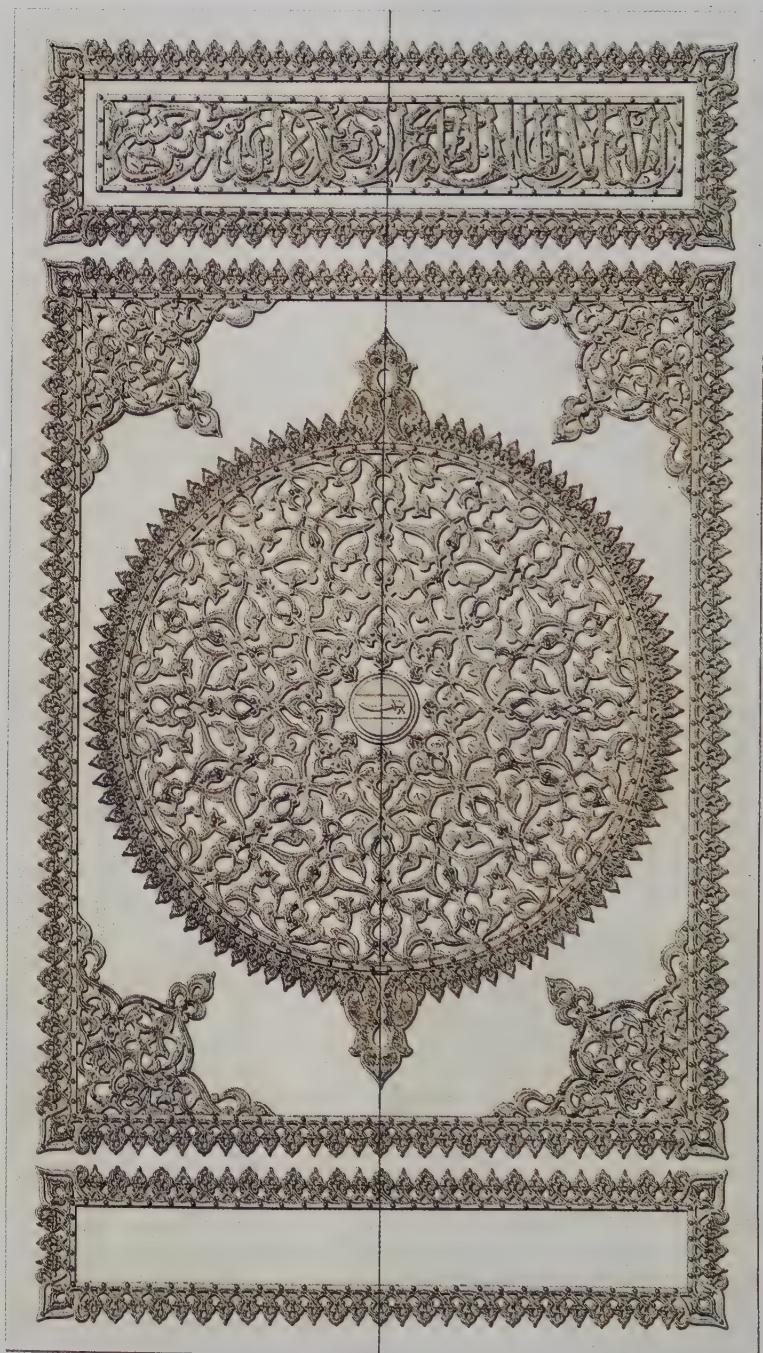


Sidi Yusef house, interior door, 18th century (left) & mosque of Barquq, bronze door, 14th century (right)

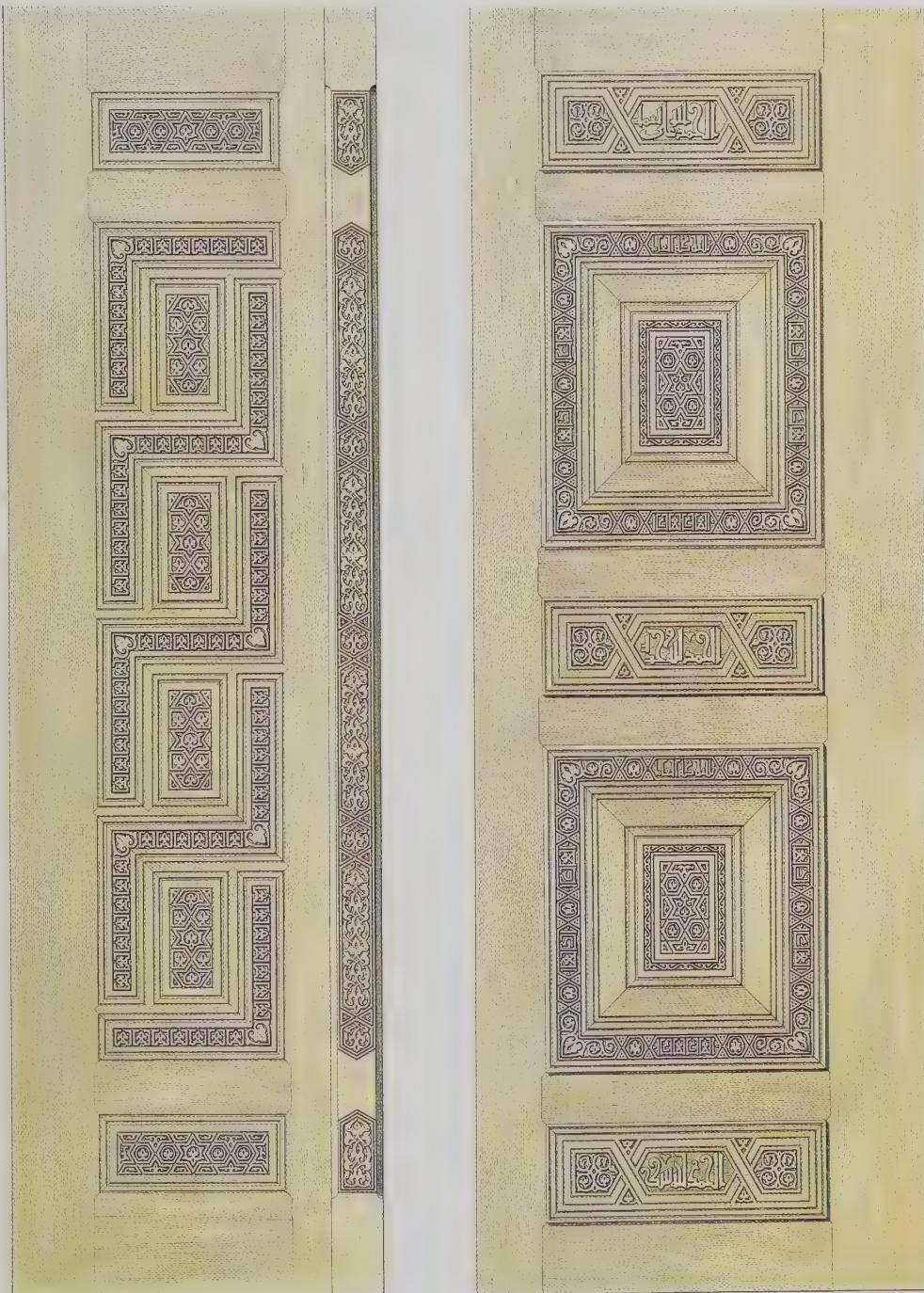
A bronze-framed wooden door from Sidi Yusef house is contrasted with a bronze-faced door from Barquq's mosque. The door from Barquq's mosque is a striking anomaly—by his reign, doors were generally no longer totally faced with bronze.



Similar to that of Barquq, the outside door of al-Yusufi mosque employs a motif commonly found in contemporary leather bookbinding. Although in this period doors were consistently decorated with a simple circle and frame arrangement, in this case the central panel is enhanced by calligraphy.



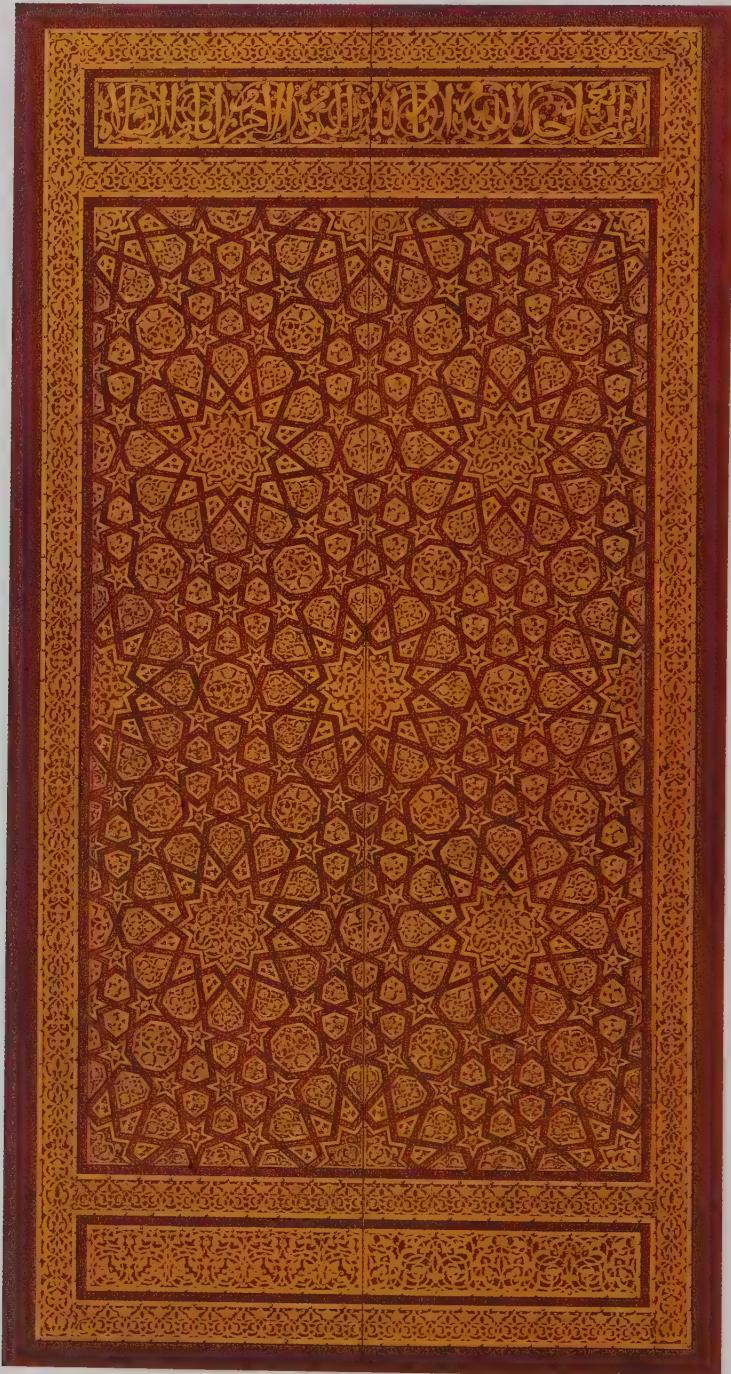
Mosque of al-Yusufi, exterior door, 14th century



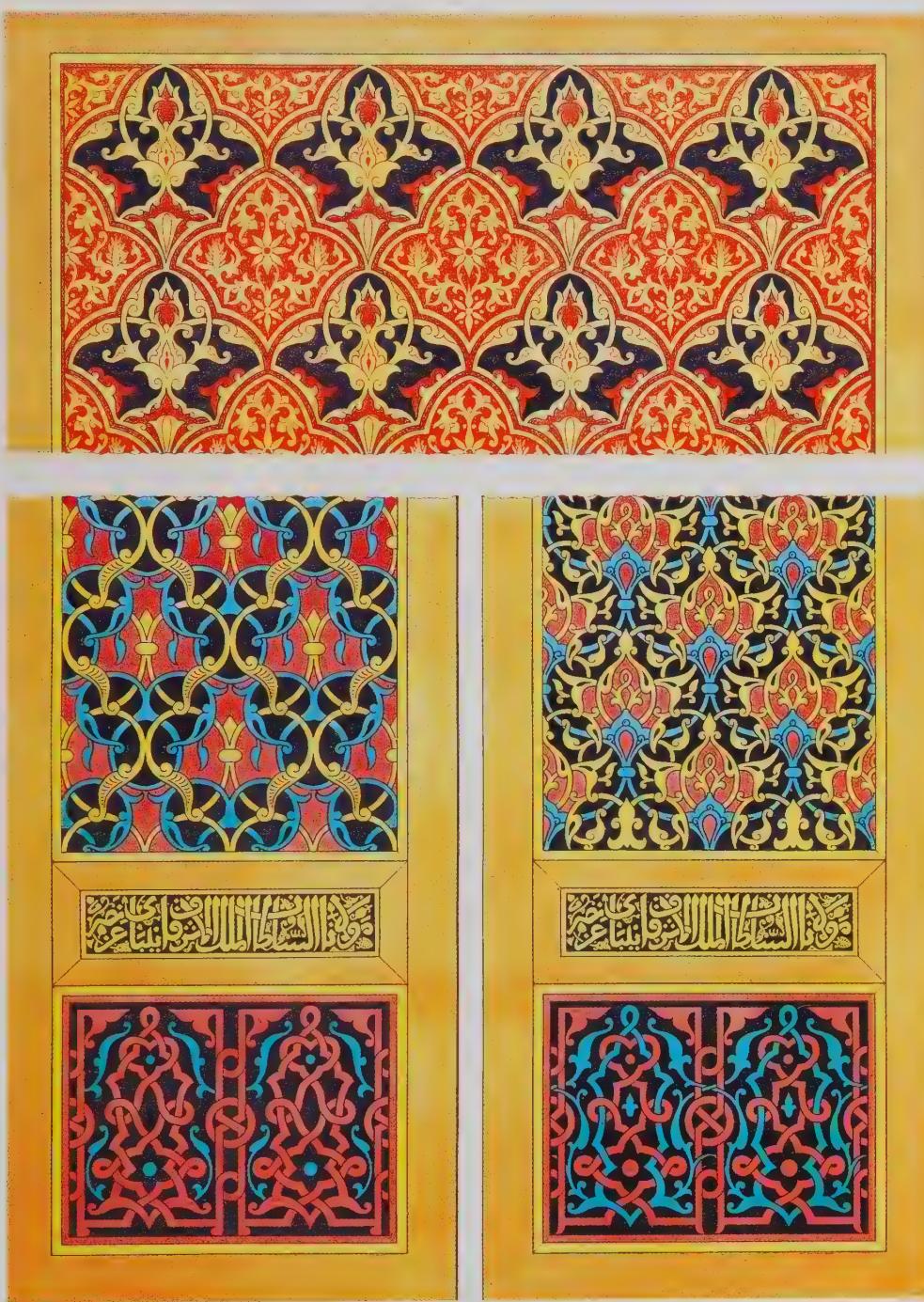
Tomb of Salih Najm al-Din, leaves of a chest and a window shutter, 13th century

Both leaves display an approach to design that fundamentally relies on depth and shadow in a way reminiscent of stone carvings. This structure marks the end of the Ayyubid building program.

The materials used to create the main door of the Sidi Yusef Ylmas mosque are difficult to identify from this drawing. The surfaces, unobstructed by bosses and knobs, suggest that the medium is wood. Similarities between doors and book covers of the time are striking.



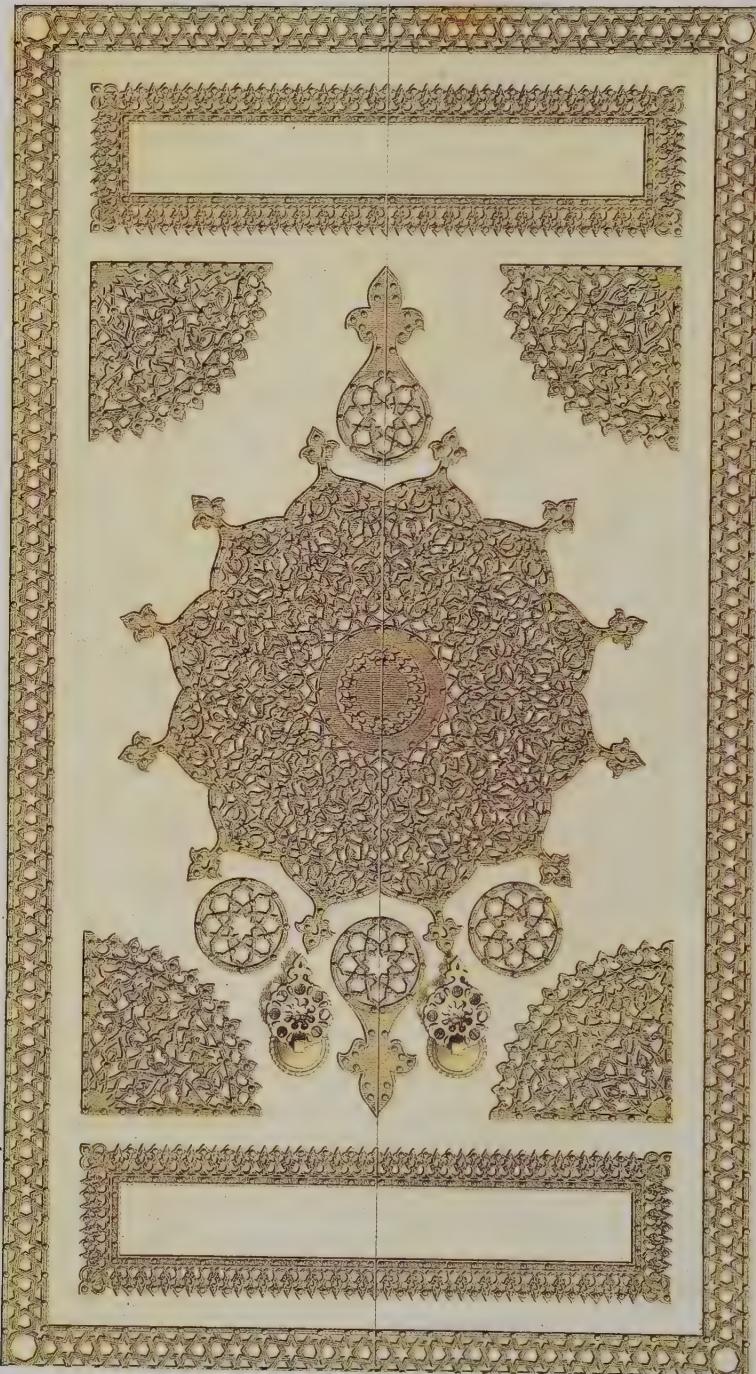
Mosque of Sidi Yusef Ylmas, main door, 14th century



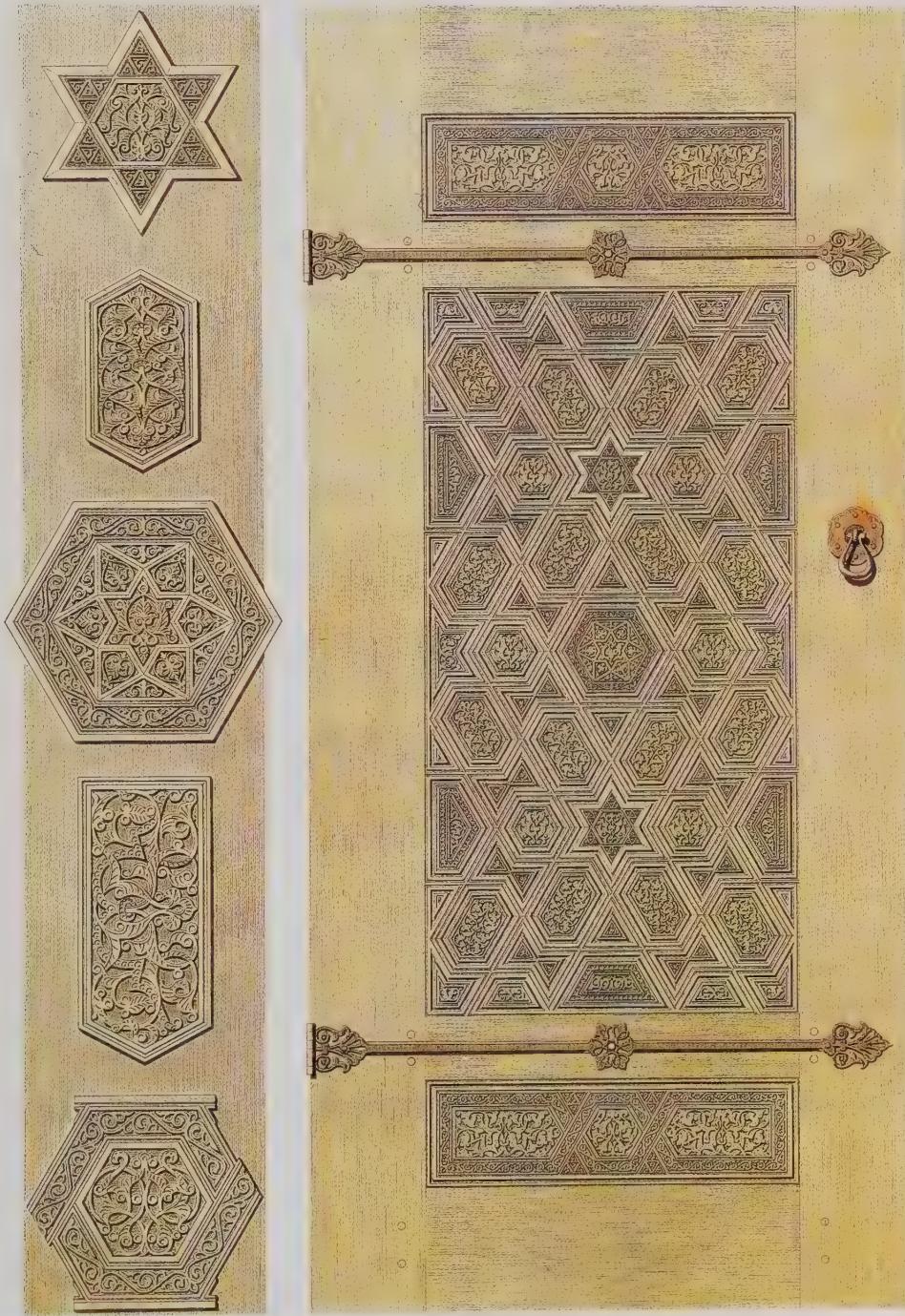
Mosque of Qaitbay, decoration on doors & cabinets, 15th century

Geometric designs captured by the woodcarver were subsequently embellished by the painter. The surfaces would have been enhanced by a finishing varnish of egg whites.

This door features an enclosing frame and floating quarter-medallion corner designs. An attempt has been made to capture the door's three dimensionality with emphasis on its fixtures. The two handles show a matching motif in a different medium.



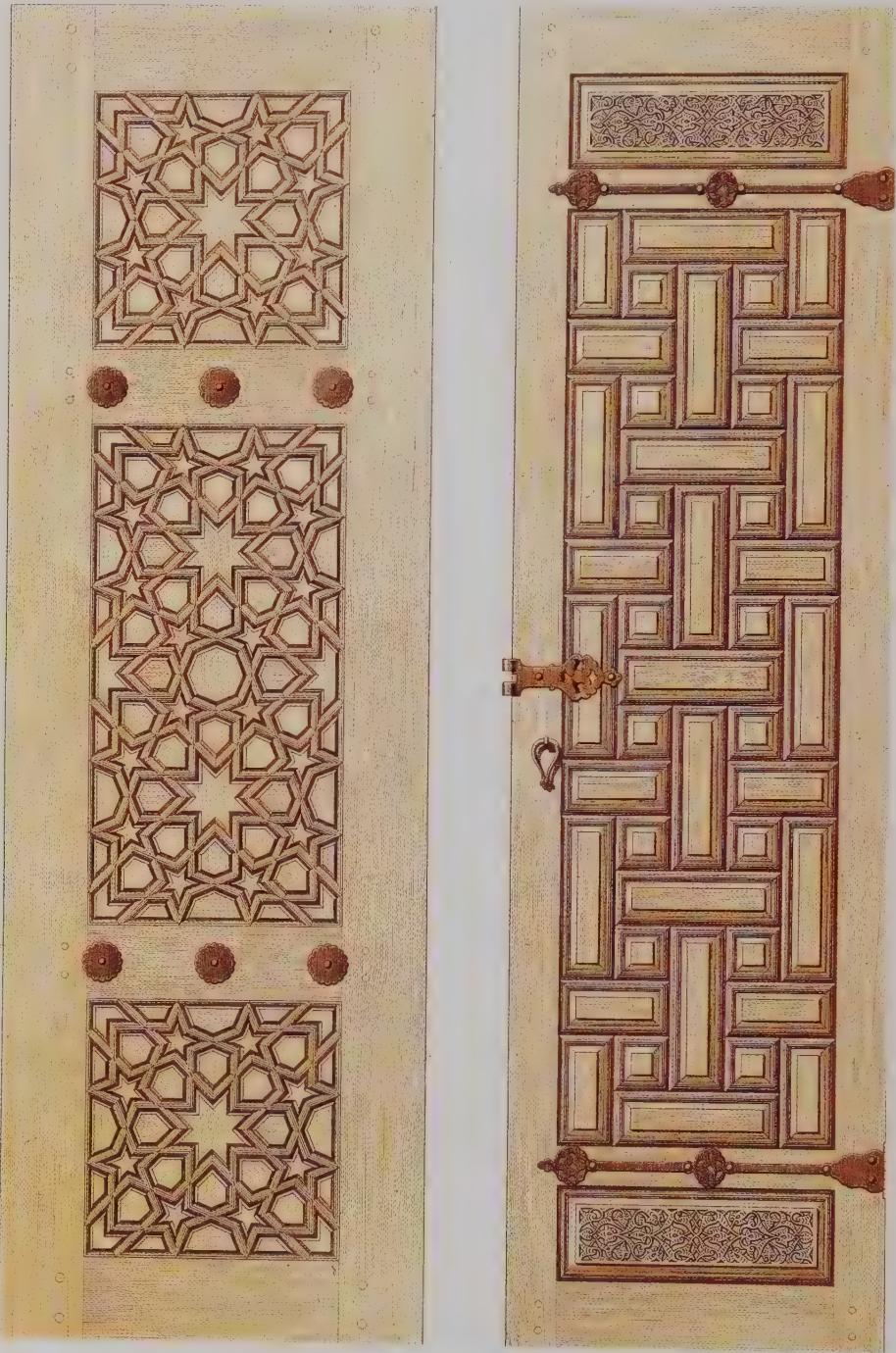
Tomb of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, inner door, 16th century



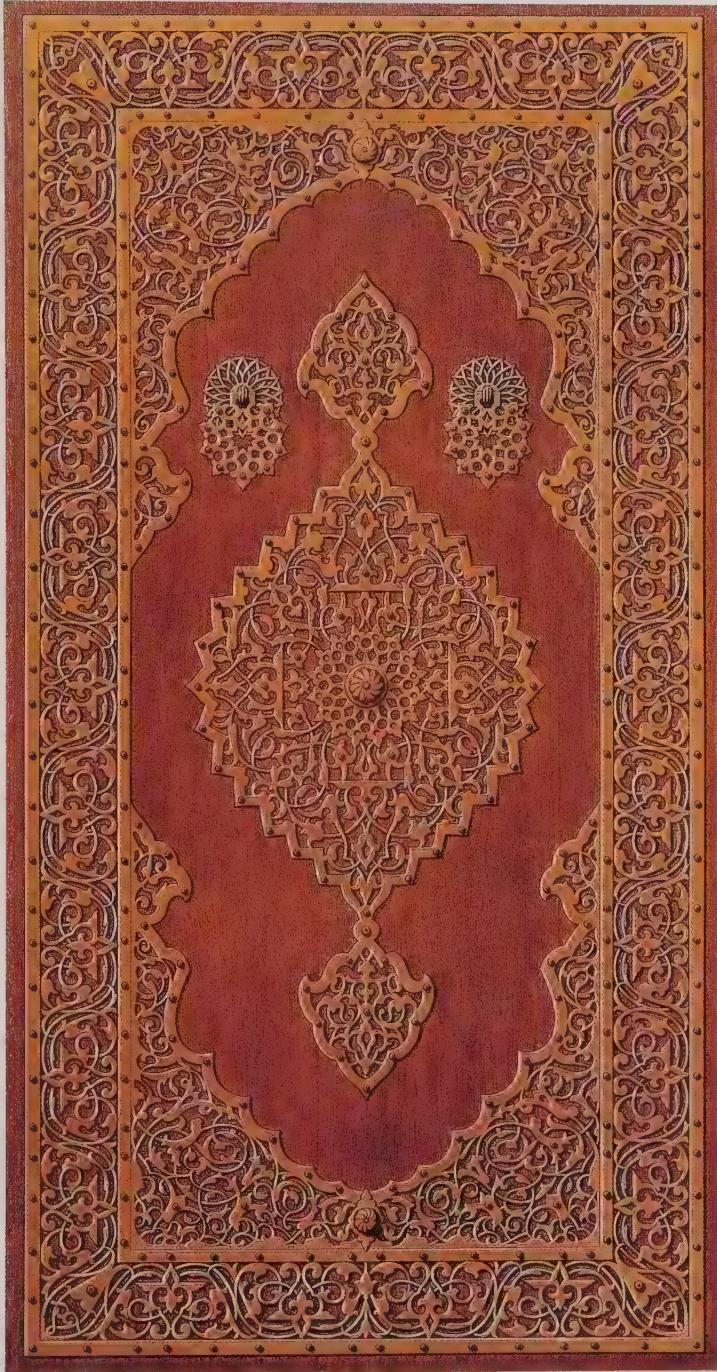
Bayt al-Emir, ensemble & details of a small door, 16th century

Typical of its time, this small door and its details are carved. Later doors were decorated with bronze on wood. Cast-iron fixtures align the design and add to the complexity of the image.

In a manner that Prisse deements to be reminiscent of true Arab art, the leaves from the Sulayman Pasha mosque in the Citadel show clear lines and obvious geometric devices. Sulayman Pasha built his mosque to an Ottoman plan and a Mamluke decorative scheme.



Sulayman Pasha mosque, leaves of a shutter & a cabinet, 16th century



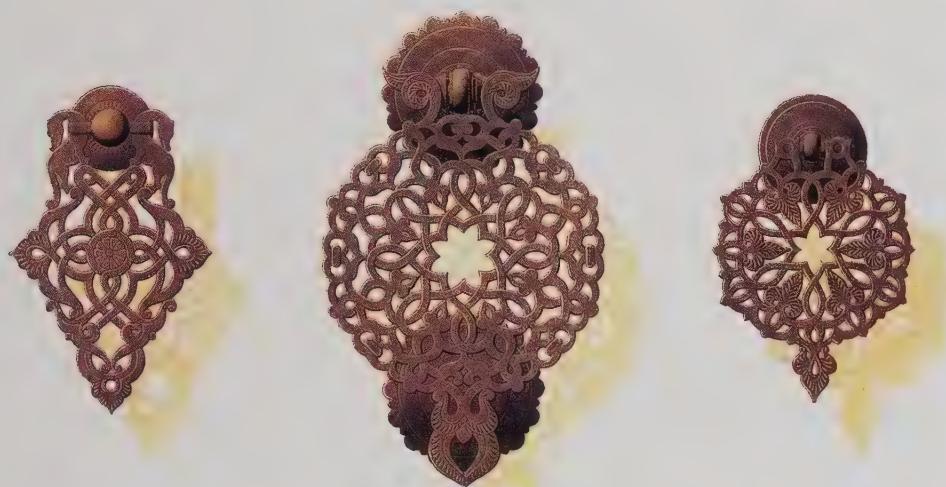
Sabil Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda, door, 18th century

This door, decorated with cast iron appliqué, was destroyed in a riot during Bonaparte's time in Cairo. Luckily, a handy draftsman was able to restore it. The design displays a Central Asian aesthetic.



This detail depicts a portion of the structure restored by the needles and files of Muslim artisans. According to Prisse, the original structure was the concept of a Christian architect.

Al-Khanqa mosque, details of a door, 18th century



Door knockers & handles, various periods

Door knockers and handles, associated with various periods and places, touch on ways ordinary folk could embellish their otherwise plain homes.



Although disputable because they closely resemble 18th-century Ottoman tilework, Prisse asserts that these wall tiles were laid in the mihrab of the Shaykhun mosque when it was erected. The mosque as a whole displays an inconsistent wall tile program, a point that becomes very clear when they are contrasted with those in plate 128.



Shaykhun mosque, mihrab wall tiles, 14th century



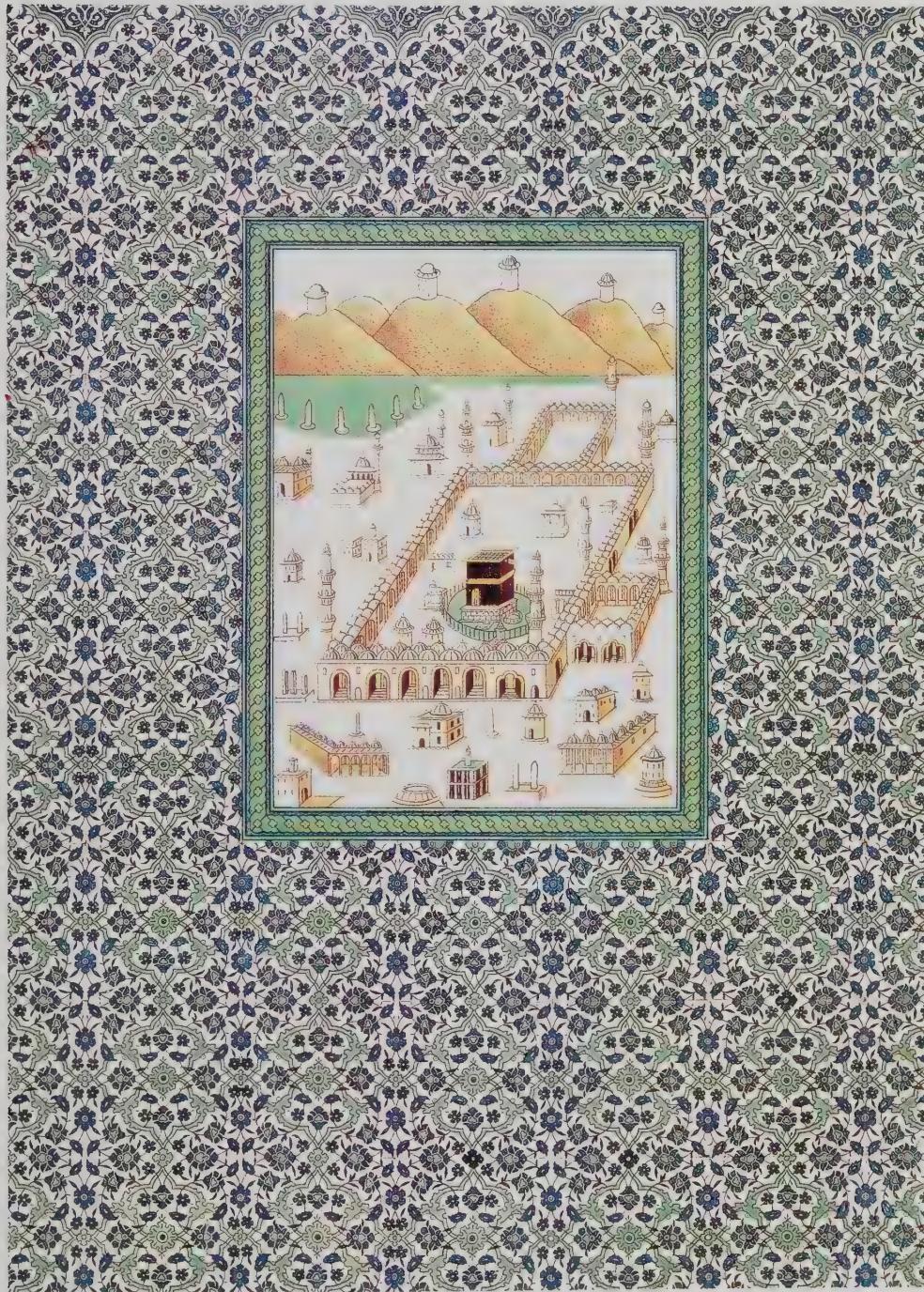
Shaykhun mosque, mihrab wall tiles, 14th century

Prisse ascribes an Andalusian origin to these wall tile designs that resemble 'zillij' patterns—introduced to Andalusia by North African Almohads, they are formed by cutting small monochrome tiles and arranging them into polychrome designs.

Prisse encouraged his team of artists to take liberties with the coloring of designs, as they did with these wall tile borders. The result leaves the viewer free to either enjoy the adulterated image or decipher the design's origin and significance.



Wall tiles, borders, 16th century



Wall tiles, panel depicting the Ka'aba and its surroundings, 16th century

The panel is from the divan of a Khurshid pasha in Ezbekiyah. Tile-work featuring holy places was typical of palace art throughout the Ottoman world. Similar panels are found in Sabil Katkhuda and various Cairo tekiyas.

Tile art not only provides insight into the technology available to artisans, but also reveals preferred raw materials. This example shows designs and perhaps luster painting techniques, involving fine ceramics and glazes, that are typically Persian.



Wall tiles of a kiosk, 16th century



Wall tiles, Mahu Bek kiosk, 16th century

The wall tiles from Mahu Bek's kiosk display crude designs more similar to those of textiles than tile-work. The garish colors chosen by the artist accentuate their humble quality.

Qus was the seat of the Abbasid caliphate during the Mamluke period. In later periods, the city maintained its allure. Hence, this remarkable tiled tympanum in the city's congregational mosque. Prisse speculates that the tiles were manufactured in Syria.



Mosque of Qus, tiled tympanum, 16th century

Prisse, in awe of the tile-work decoration in the mosque of Qus, included this section of the frieze with remarkable kufic characters from the Fatiha, the opening sura in the Quran. The common occurrence of this sura makes it useful for comparing calligraphy.



Mosque of Qus, tile-work decoration, 16th century

Wall tiles found in the palace of Ismail Bek exemplify the assimilation of Iznik tile technology in Cairo. These tiles are made from a coarse-grained potter's clay. To eliminate surface flaws, they were coated with off-white slip and fired at high temperatures.



Palace of Ismail Bek, wall tiles, 16th century



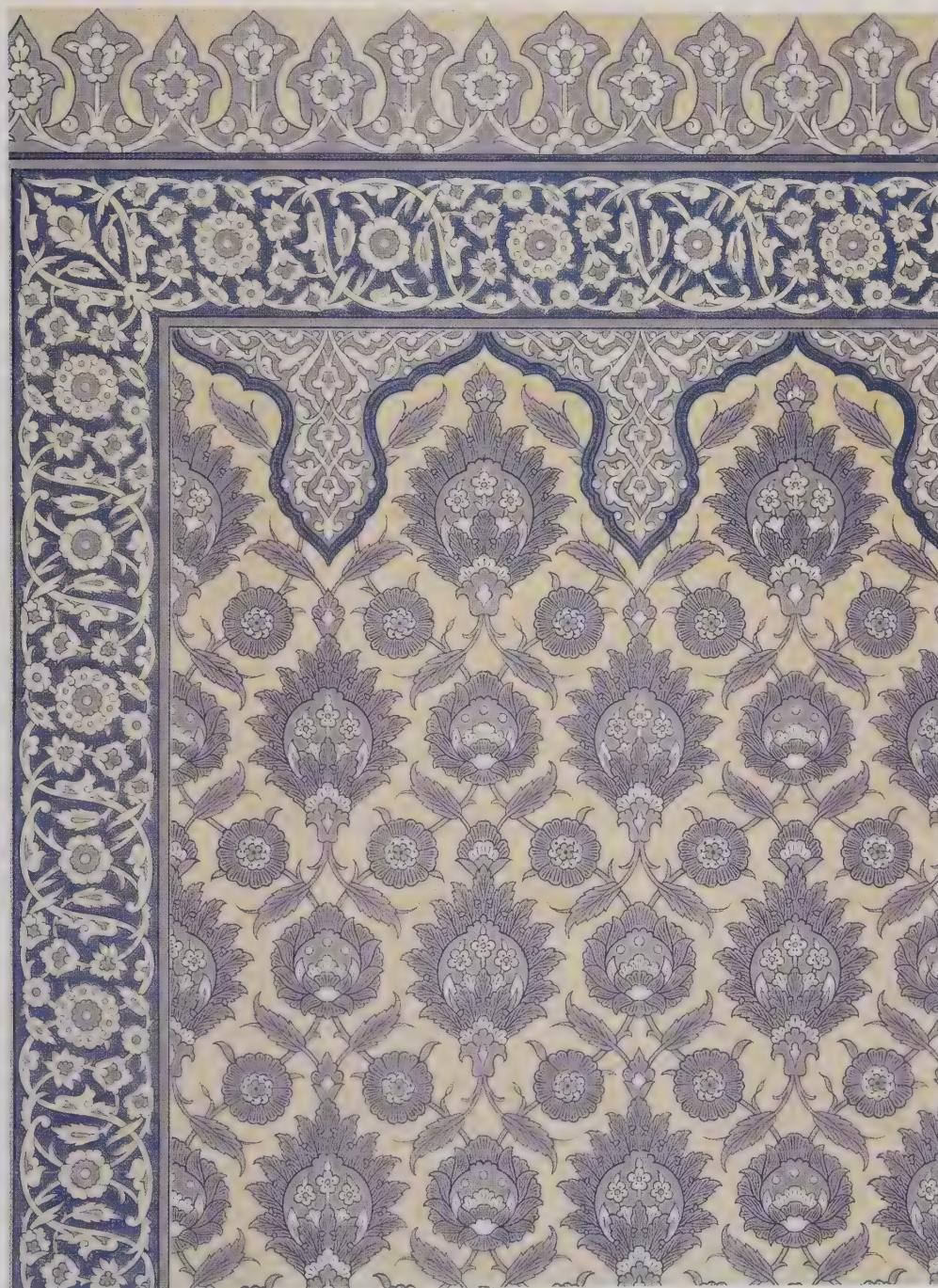
Radwan Palace, wall tiles, 17th century

The wall tiles from the Radwan palace display delicate designs that the artist has chosen to render in muted colour. Like the tiles in Ismail Bek's palace, these tiles feature designs painted under a fired transparent lead glaze.



Iznik tiles could be decorated either with skillful free brush strokes or, as in these wall tiles, with stenciled designs. Three shades of blue were commonly used, as well as turquoise, purple, green in the contours, and occasionally black for definition.

Radwan Palace, wall tiles, 17th century



Mosque of Aqsunqur, wall tiles, 17th century

The Mamluke mosque of Aqsunqur (1347) was redecorated in 1652 by the janissary Ibrahim Agha Mustahfizan when he built his mausoleum next to its entrance, adorning it extensively with blue and green tiles along the qibla and in the mausoleum.



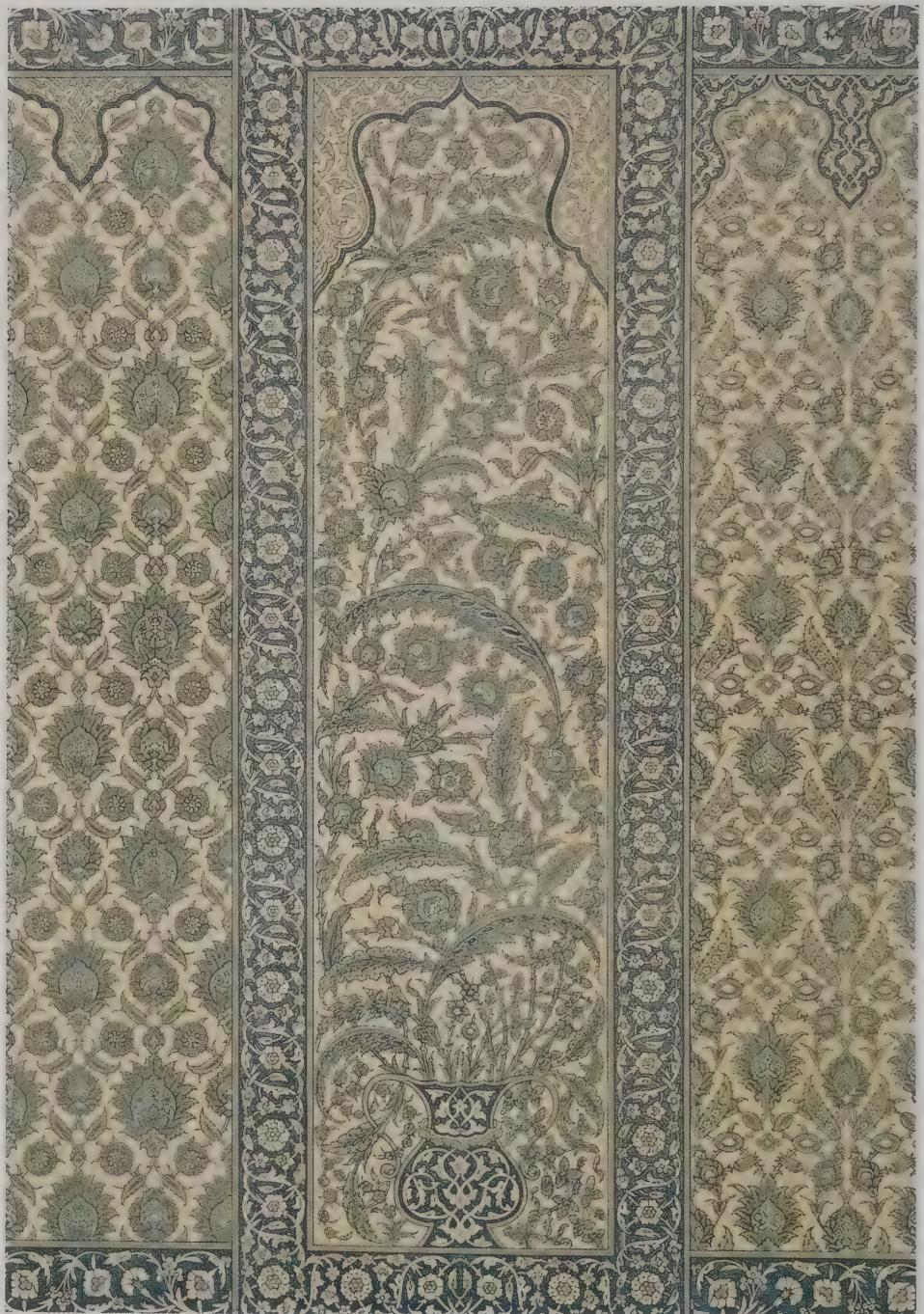
Remarkably similar to the tiles in plate 119 above, only subtle differences in the treatment of the borders and the extent to which the arabesques flower, distinguish the two.

Mosque of Aqsunqur, wall tiles, 17th century



Mosque of Aqsunqur, tiled pseudo-mihrab, 17th century

Naturalistic cedar trees are combined with architectural motifs—a hanging lamp set in columned arches—in this tiled pseudo-mihrab. Architectonic tile-work designs feature prominently in this mosque.

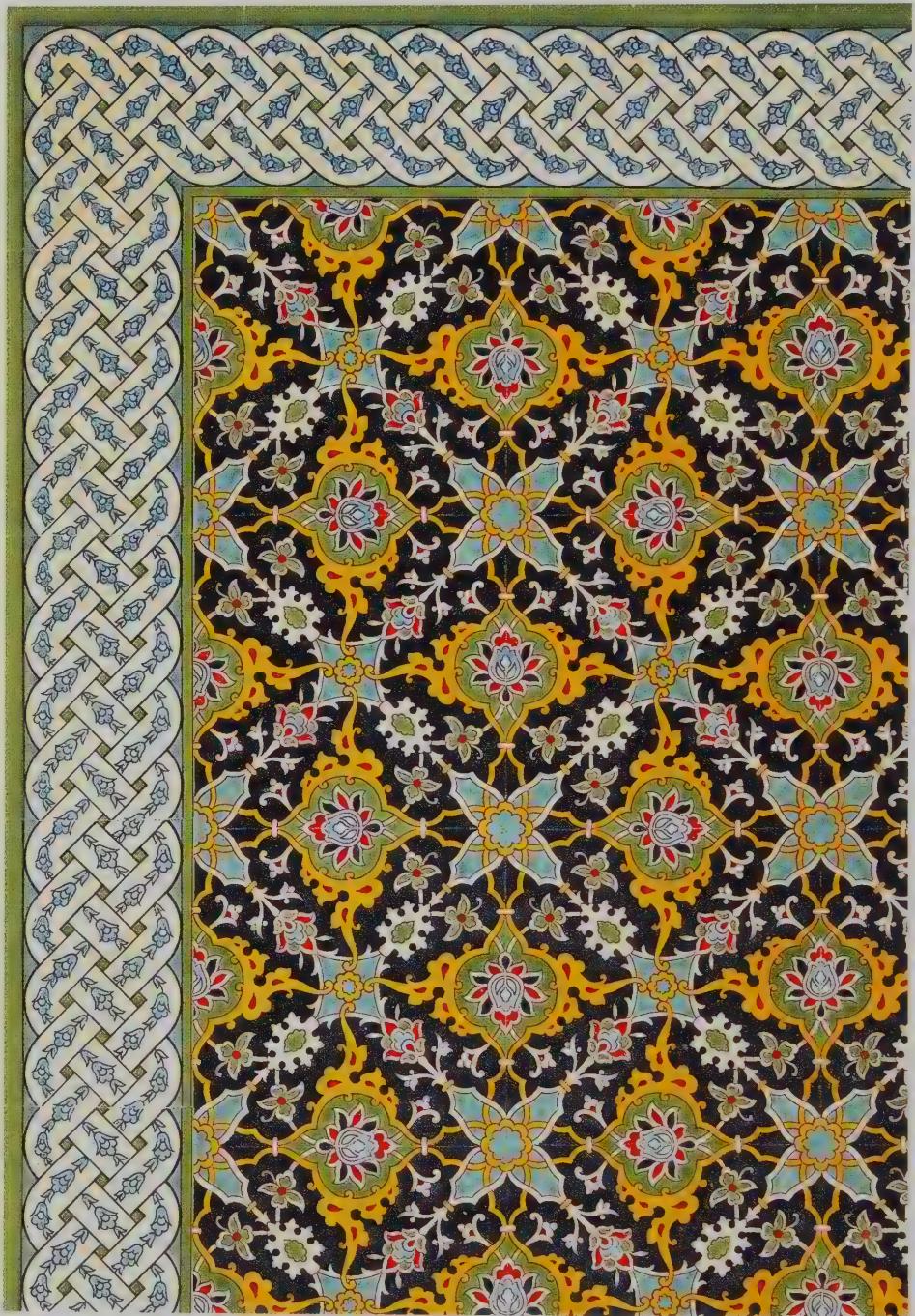


Mosque of Aqsunqur, tiled panel, 17th century



Tekiya of the Dervishes, wall tiles, 17th century

The tekiya located in Muski, the European quarter in Prisse's time, is coated from one end to the other in tiles like the ones shown here. The tiles were acquired from sources throughout Cairo, producing an irregular design program.



These wall tiles resemble Cuerda Seca (or Dry Cord) tiles. The technique, known since the 11th century but popularized in 17th-century Ottoman Egypt, uses outlines of manganese and grease mixture filled with white and colored glazes.

Tekiya of the Dervishes, wall tiles, 17th century

The most remarkable aspect of this design is the naskh calligraphy, set apart by its frame. The lines of the script are offset by surrounding arabesques.



Tekiya of the Dervishes, glazed tile tympanum and borders of an arcade, 17th century



Bayt al-Emir, wall tiles, 17th century

Bayt al-Emir belonged to a high-ranking government official, so it is likely that details such as those shown here were of high quality. The intricate patterns, although not especially innovative, reveal the patron's refined tastes.



Glazed tiles, 18th century

Prisse describes these glazed tiles as 'double-patterned' because the pattern can be viewed either from the base of the chevron or from its mid-point. Thus, he explains, two designs emerge from one.



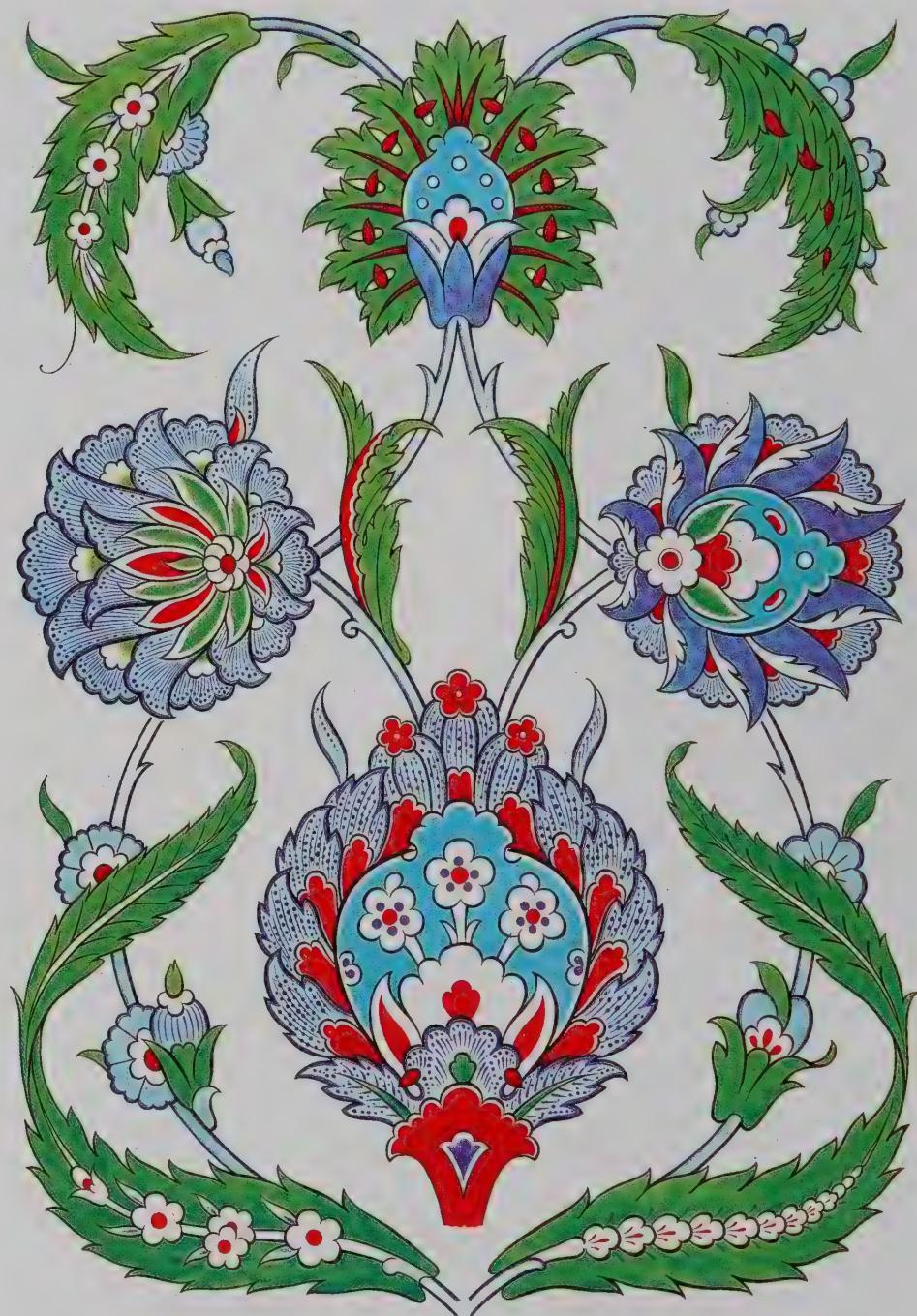
This section of wall tiles, added in the course of 18th-century renovations to the 14th-century mosque, disregarded the original design program, which had been guided by 'zillij' designs (plates 108 and 109).

Shaykhun mosque, wall tiles, 18th century



Sabil Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda, wall tiles, 18th century

Fine examples of corner-pieces that decorate the three main windows of the ground floor in the magnificently adorned sabil of Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda. Iznik tile designs are fully realized in these depictions of roses, carnations, and hyacinths.



Prisse reproduced these leaves and floral ornaments painted on tile from a pseudo-mihrab in full size to show the brilliance, beauty, and boldness of their design.

Studies of leaves and floral ornaments painted on tile



Oval panel in tile

Prisse included this oval tile panel to demonstrate how tiles were used to dress whitewashed walls. Bitterly disappointed by the quality of its craftsmanship, he assesses the panel as being "of a clumsy, probably Turkish style—drawn from Asia Minor."



According to Prisse, these wall tiles were found in a hanout, a small edifice with basins where the dead were bathed and wrapped in shrouds before being taken to the cemetery. The tiles were of fine quality materials and design.



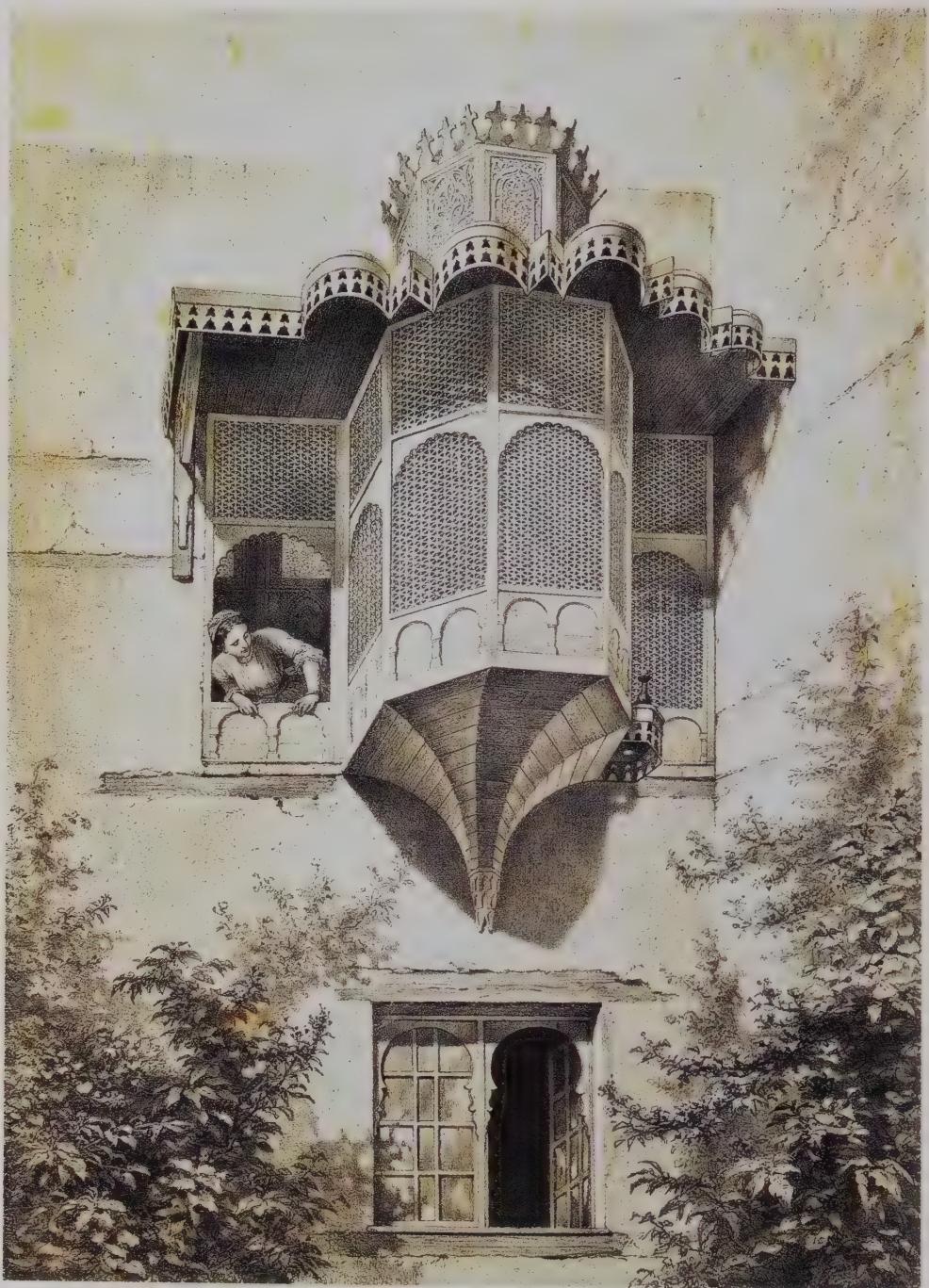
Wall tiles from a hanout



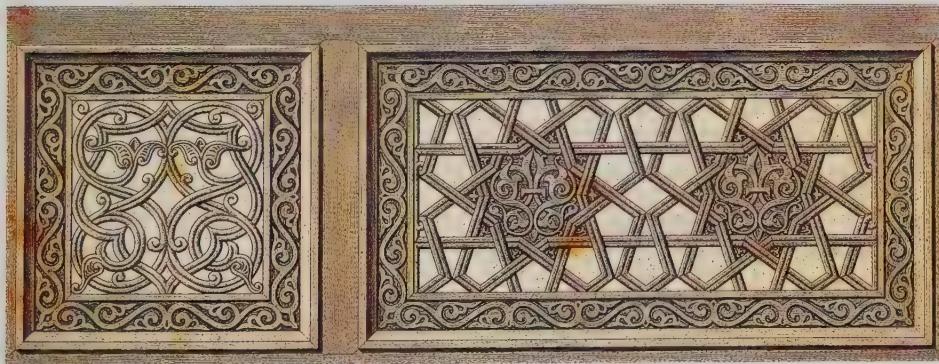
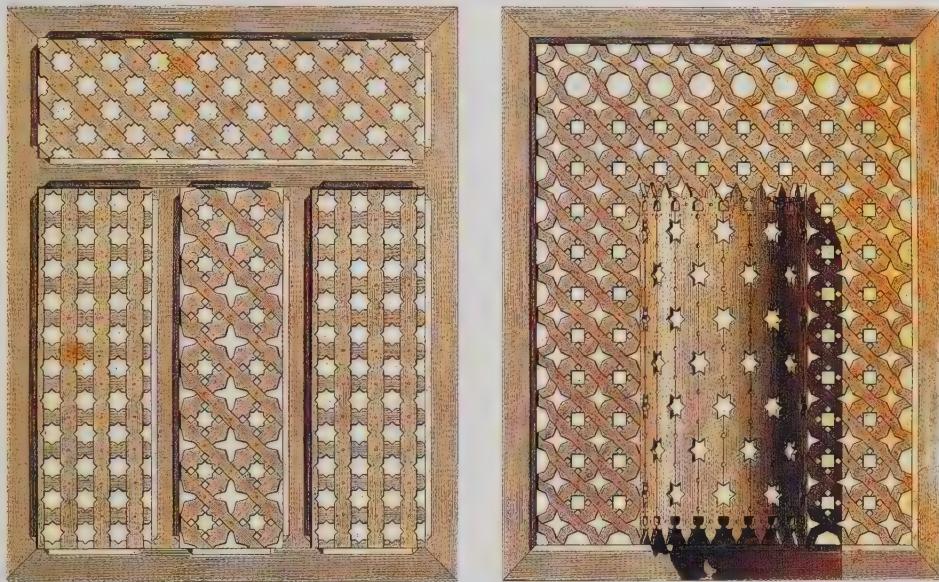
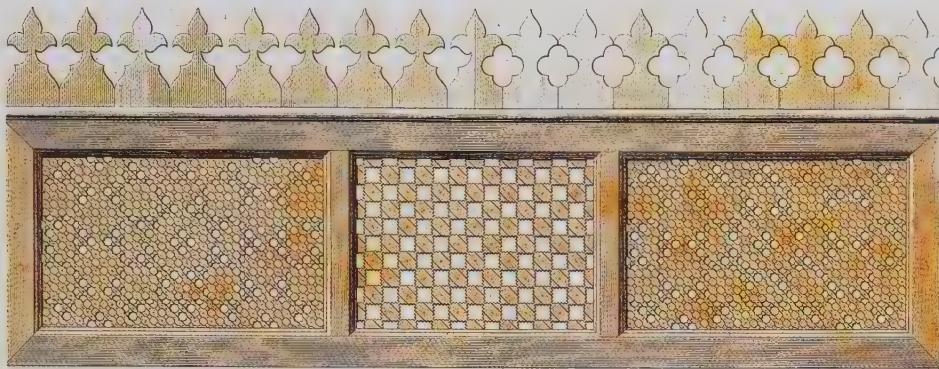
Sulayman Pasha mosque, crown of the minbar door, 16th century

Prisse included this plate as a testimony to the decay of artistry and workmanship under the Ottomans. This crown of a minbar door executed in painted marble is in Prisse's view a failed attempt at simulating a tile covering.

Described as resembling an "aviary affixed to a wall" the interior mashrabiya in Bayt al-Emir illustrates the complementary natures of wood and greenery. Climbing plants around the window neutralize the glare of the sun and sprout flowers, which brighten the view from inside the harem.

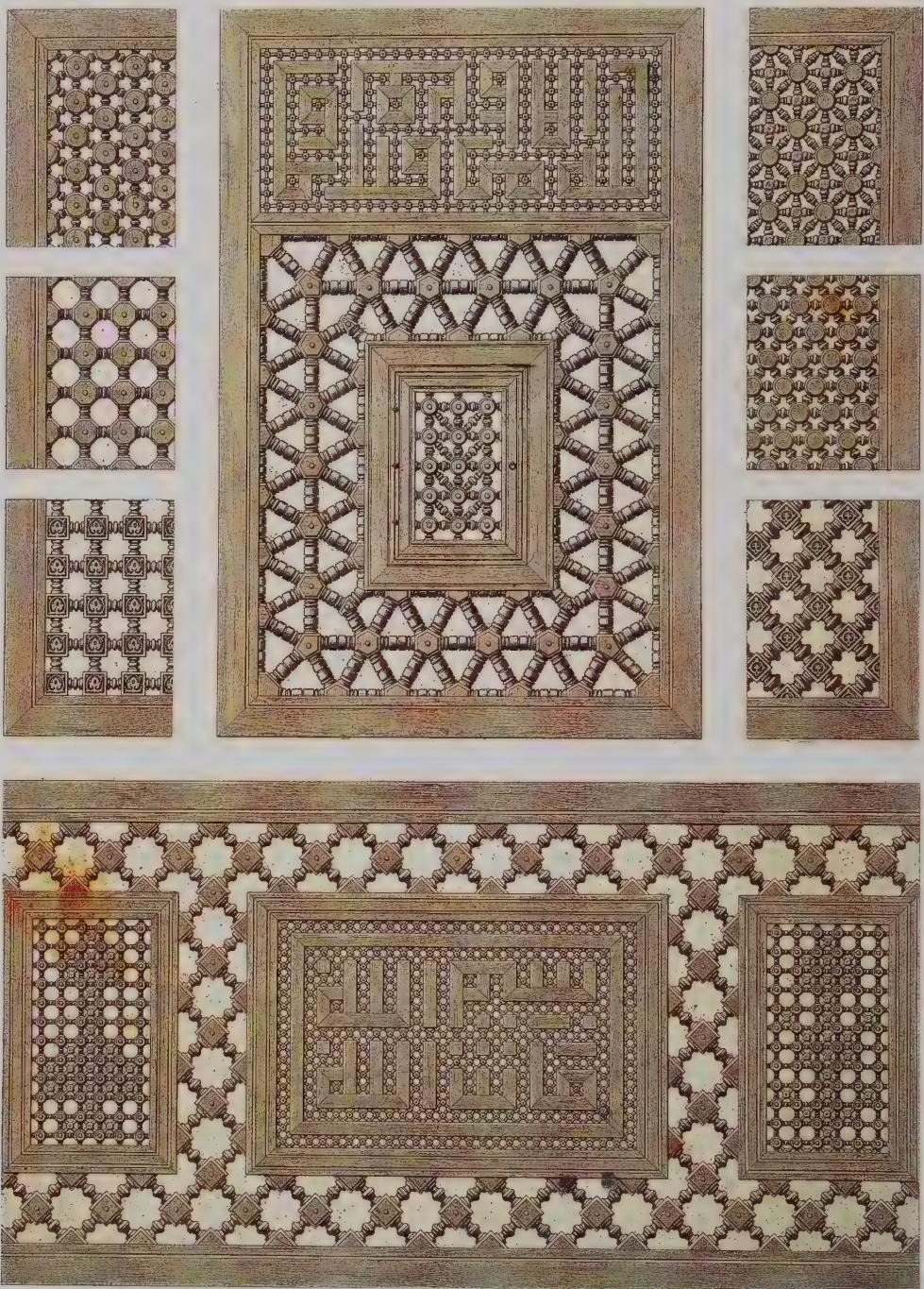


Bayt al-Emir, interior mashrabiya, 18th century



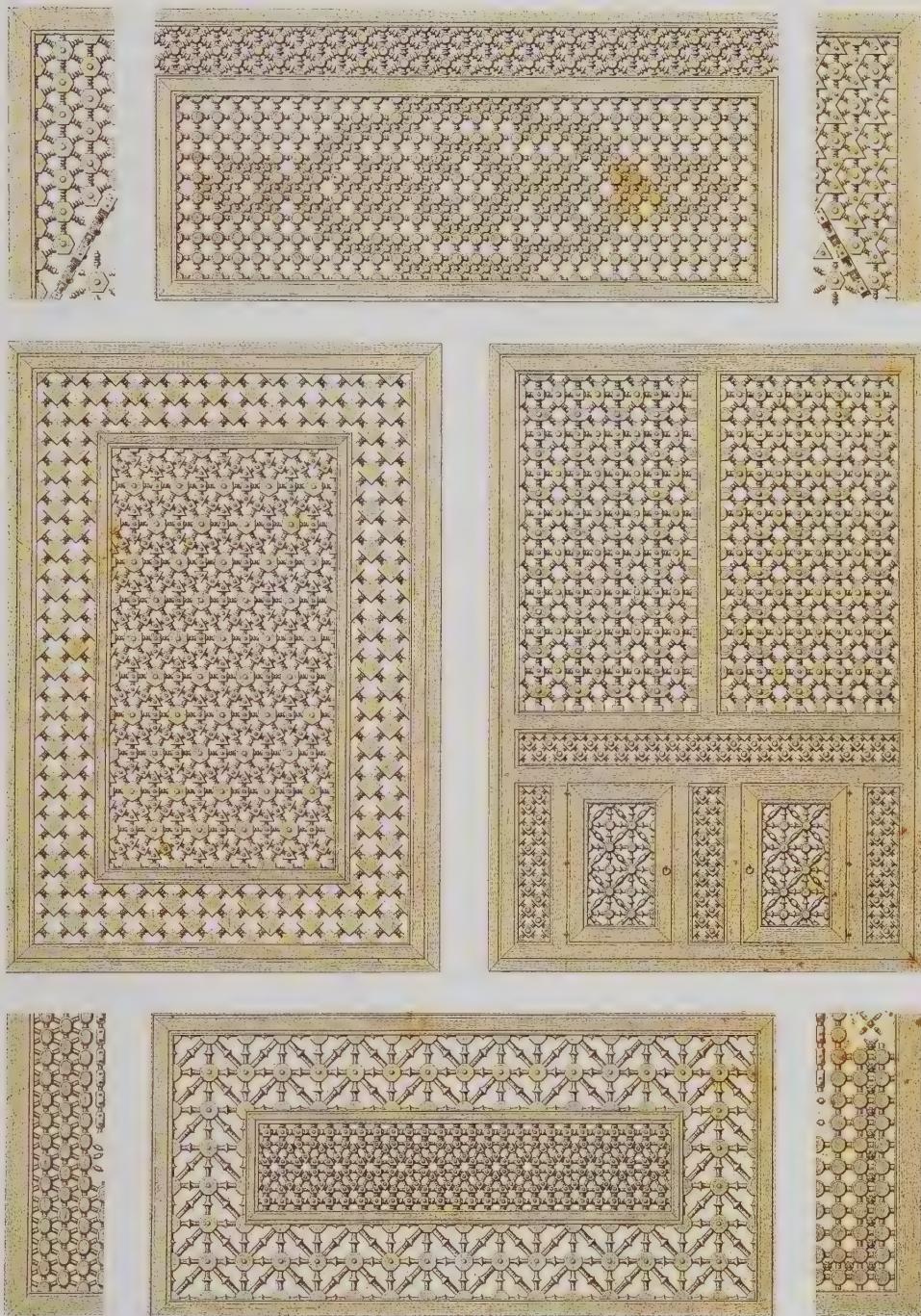
Mashrabiya, ensemble & details

The carved-wood latticework, commonly referred to as mashrabiya, is composed of small pieces of wood that are turned in various forms and fixed together, without glue or nails, simply by being inserted into each other.



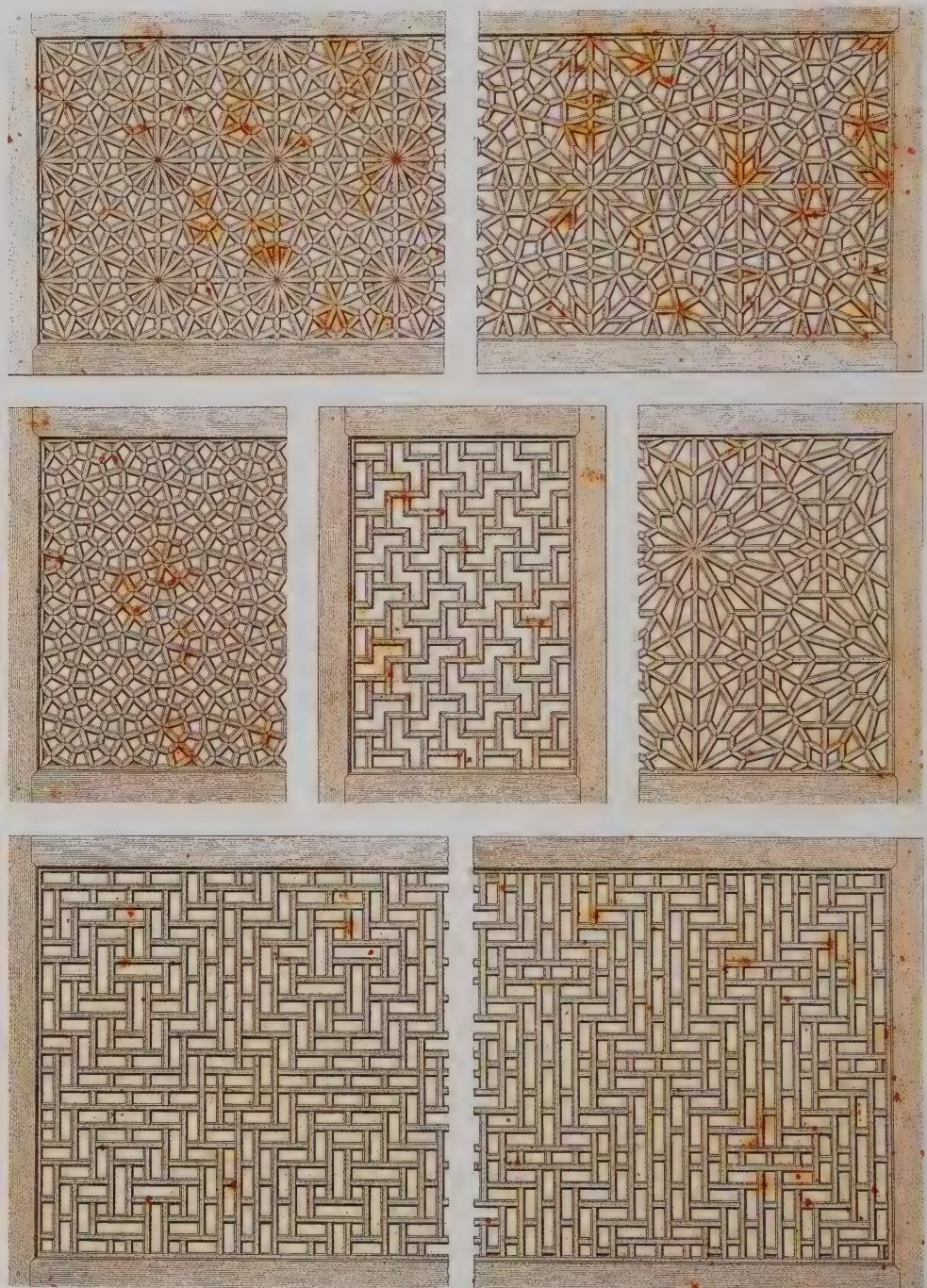
Mashrabiya was a popular type of window cover in Cairo, where it assumed a multitude of patterns and combinations. In this example, kufic inscriptions are incorporated into the backdrop of cut wood and latticework.

Mashrabiya with Kufic inscriptions



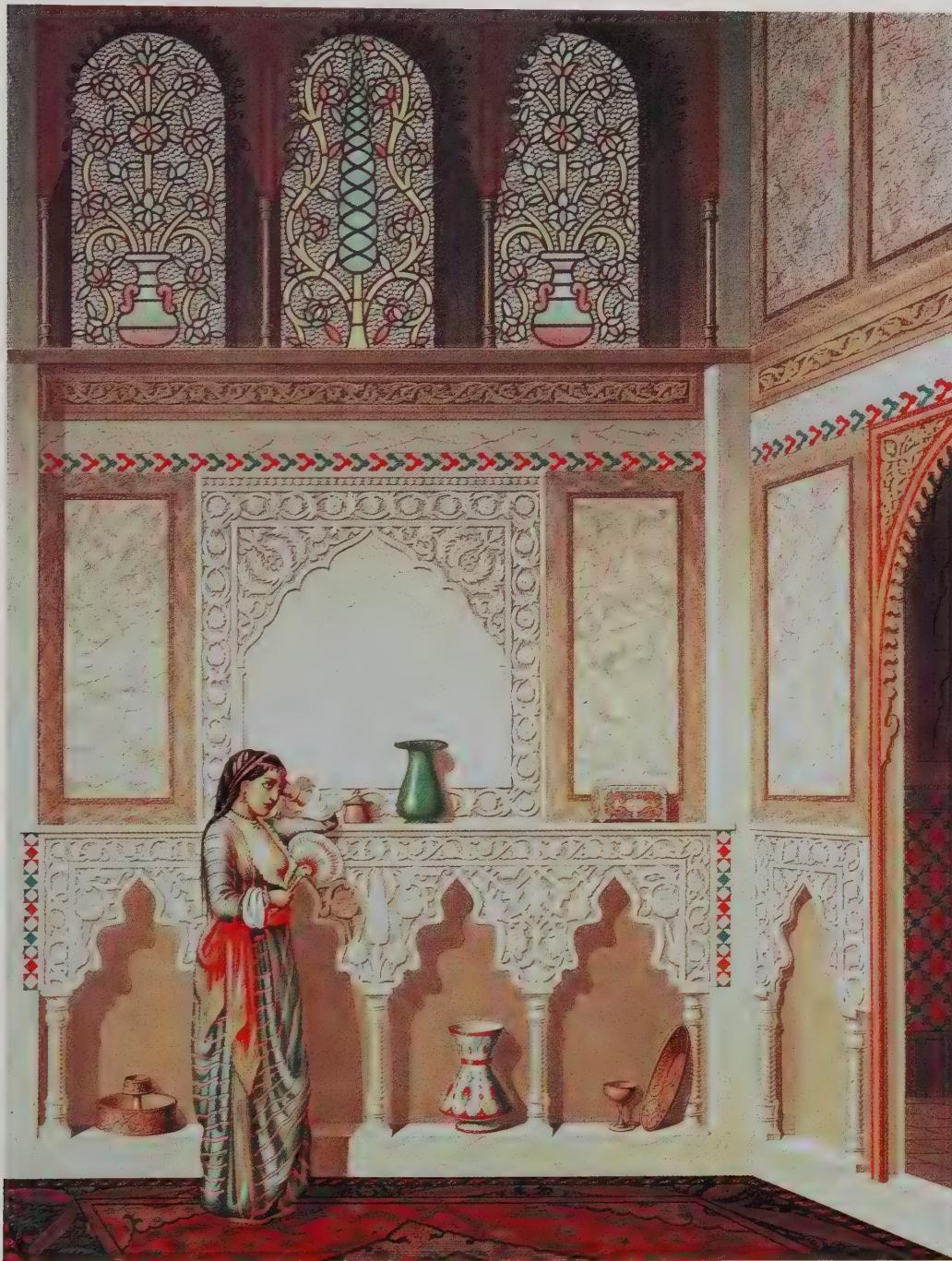
Mashrabiya windows, ensemble, & details

Mashrabiya bays displaying turned-wood latticework, windows, and details like those shown here were described by Prisse's contemporary E. W. Lane as niches where water jars were kept cool.



These sections and fragments of mashrabiya display an array of designs. By the late Mamluke period, the technique was found in modest dwellings. From the Ottoman conquest of Egypt until the reign of Muhammad Ali, mashrabiya was regularly used in domestic architecture.

Mashrabiya, sections and fragments



Sidi Yusef Adami house, upstairs salon

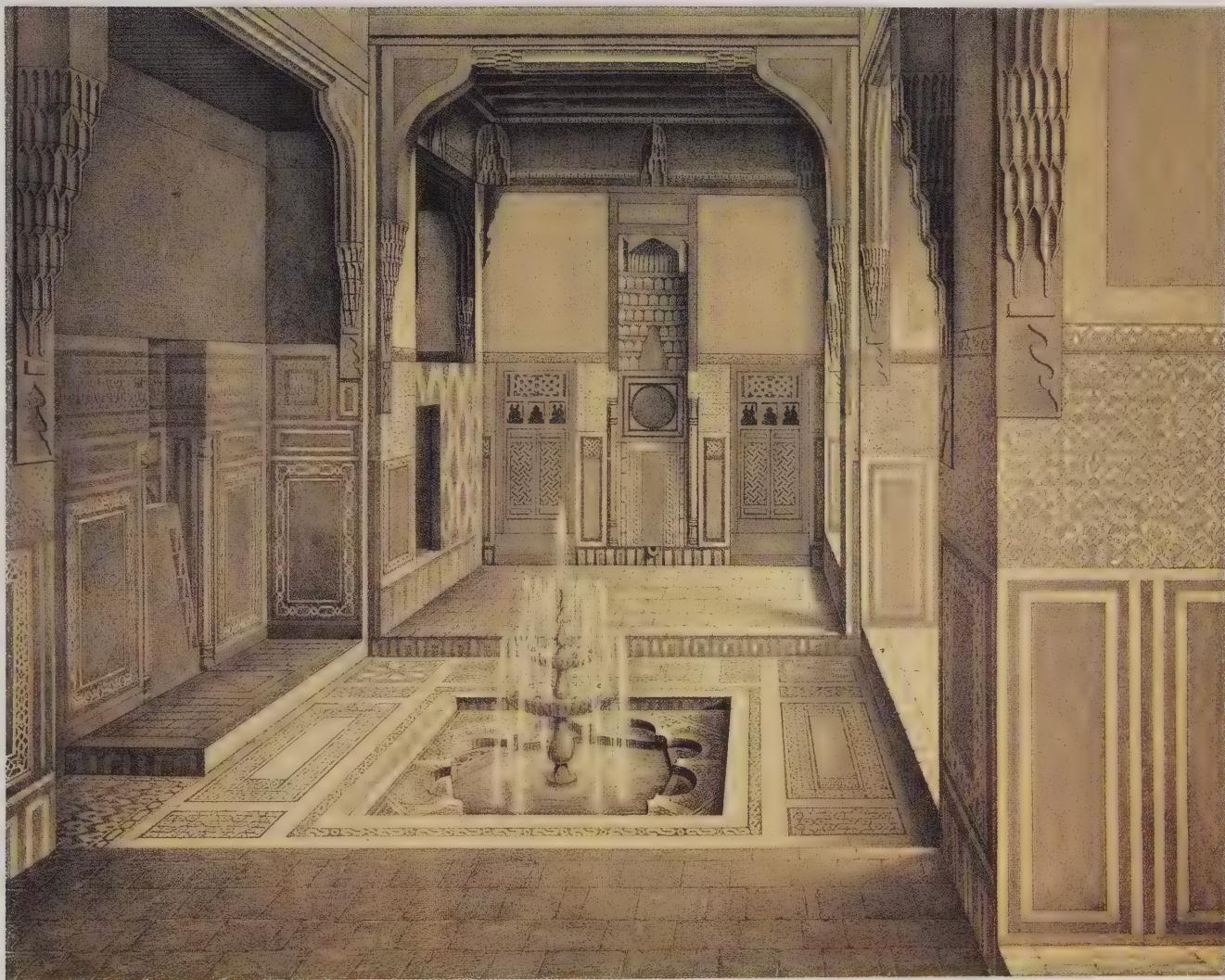
This rendition of an upstairs salon in the Sidi Yusef Adami house offers a sense of propriety and proportion. To provide secluded women with comfort, polystextured surfaces were used to create an airy environment.



Sidi Yusef Adami house, wet nurse's chamber

The room for the wet nurse shows how rooms were oriented around courtyards. Here, the various rooms positioned around the lush courtyard were used in particular seasons, depending on whether sun or breeze were desired.

The ground-floor mandara, or reception room, in Sidi Yusef Adami's house is, according to architectural convention, central to the larger salamlik. The paved courtyard is adorned with a fountain and surrounded by iwans, which are raised above floor level and furnished with carpets and divans.



Sidi Yusef Adami house, mandara



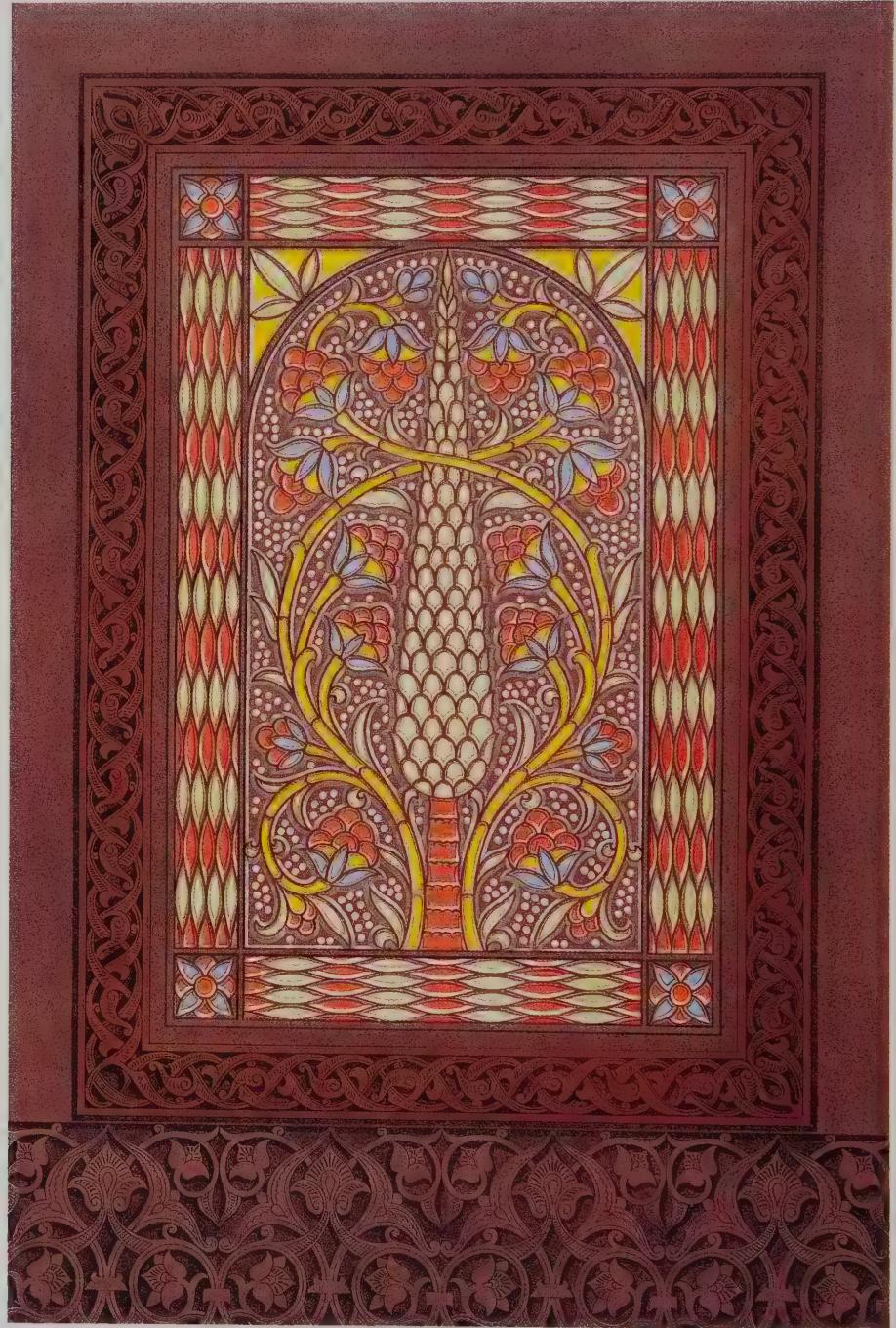
Husni Ahmad al-Burdayni house, 17th century



Madrasa of Sultan Barquq, lamp in enameled glass, 14th century

The lamp displays primary designs based on horizontal bands. The band of calligraphy traced with enamel is a rendition of the first phrase from the 24th sura of the Quran, "Allah is the light of heavens and earth."

Prisse regards this shamsa as indicative of the assimilation of Byzantine gilding and enameling practices in Egypt. The plasterwork was removed and presumably lost in a late 19th-century renovation.



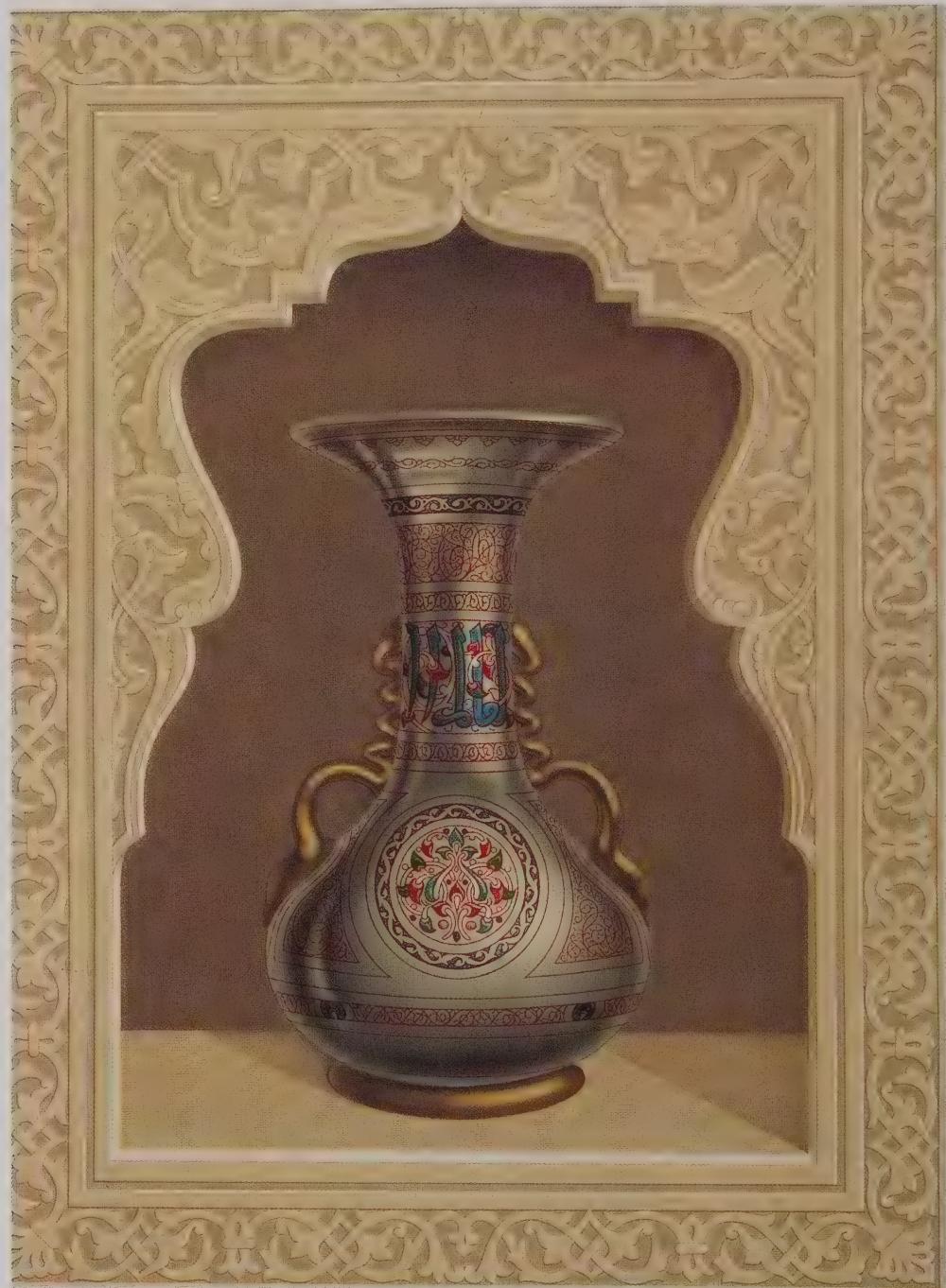
Sayyida Zaynab mosque, shamsa or stained glass window with perforated plaster, 14th century



Madrasa of Barquq, shamsa or stained glass window with perforated plaster, 14th century

This shamsa was shattered while being transported to the 1867 Paris Exposition. Upon hearing that the owner was disposing of the pieces, Prisse acquired them and reconstructed the window.

This 16th-century vessel of glazed glass belonged to Prisse's time to a private collection. He was convinced that it was made in Egypt. Its "mild and harmonious" coloring resembles many lamps made in Mansura, a town in the Delta renowned for its glassware.



Vase in glazed glass, 16th century



Tapestry, 12th century

A 12th-century tapestry, found in a church where it enveloped the relics of a saint, displays a date tree between two standing Cerberuses that, to Prisse, resemble "blind and lifeless poodles." The design is pre-Islamic but the textile is Islamic.



Prisse views this silk tapestry in Toulouse as a crude copy of a common prototype (possibly plate 151). Lively cross-trade between Europe, China and the Arab world supported the evolution of designs and the persistent use of animals in textile designs.

Silk tapestry, conserved in Toulouse, 10th century



Fragment of a tapestry, conserved in the cathedral of Nivelles, Belgium, 14th century

Prisse attributes this fragment of a tapestry to the 14th-century Hispano-Mauresque workshops in Andalusia. In designs from Andalusia, horizontal bands were used to break up patterns based on stars juxtaposed with rosettes.

This carpet achieved fame because it was used by Venetian painter Paris Bordone as a model, placed at the feet of the Doge in his painting Fisherman of the Adriatic Bearing the Ring of St. Mark.



Small velvety ushak carpet, 16th century



Textile, conserved at the Utrecht Museum, 14th century

The motif of three rows of peacocks with closed tails in an arabesque frame was a convention prevalent in 14th-century textiles like this one found in the Utrecht Museum. In this characteristic arrangement, the tones and the style of fabric are similar to those of the Nivelles textile.



The covering of this quiver and bow case, crimson velvet adorned with arabesques, typifies Ottoman textiles that usually bore talismans—Quranic verses, pious invocations, or magical squares containing numbers and alphabets for divine protection.

Quiver and bow case, 16th century



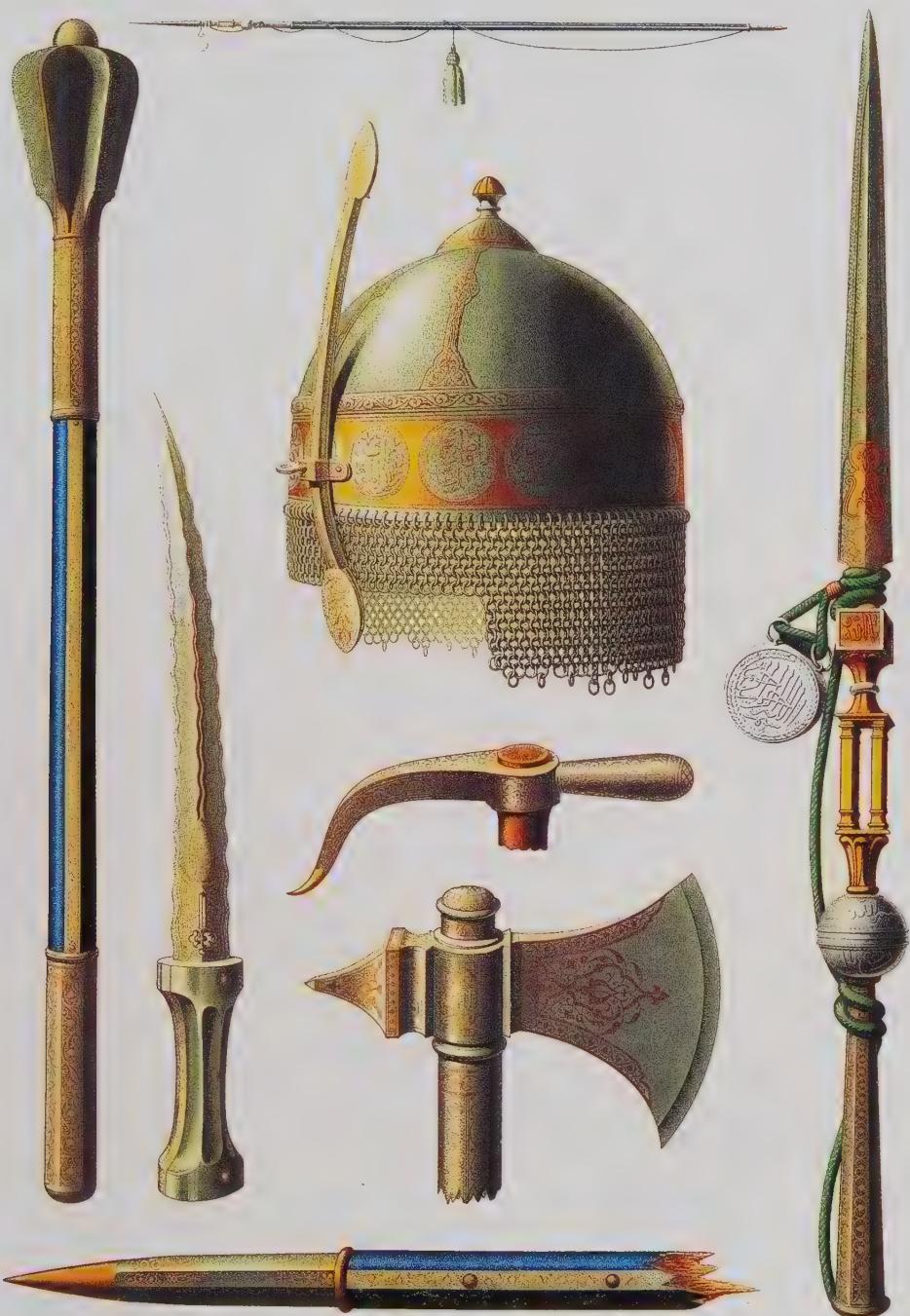
Large velvety carpet, 18th century

This large, velvety carpet was styled after contemporary bookbinding decoration. The medallion or 'star ushak' designs relied on a palette of deep reds and blues, out of which realistic and abstracted blossom motifs could be worked in up to nine colors.

Haita tapestries, like this 18th-century example, were used in winter to cover marble surfaces in the salamlik. This haita includes a motif of arches articulated by ivy leaves, a visual substitute for architectural features that would have been obscured by the tapestry.



Haita tapestry for covering wall panels, 18th century



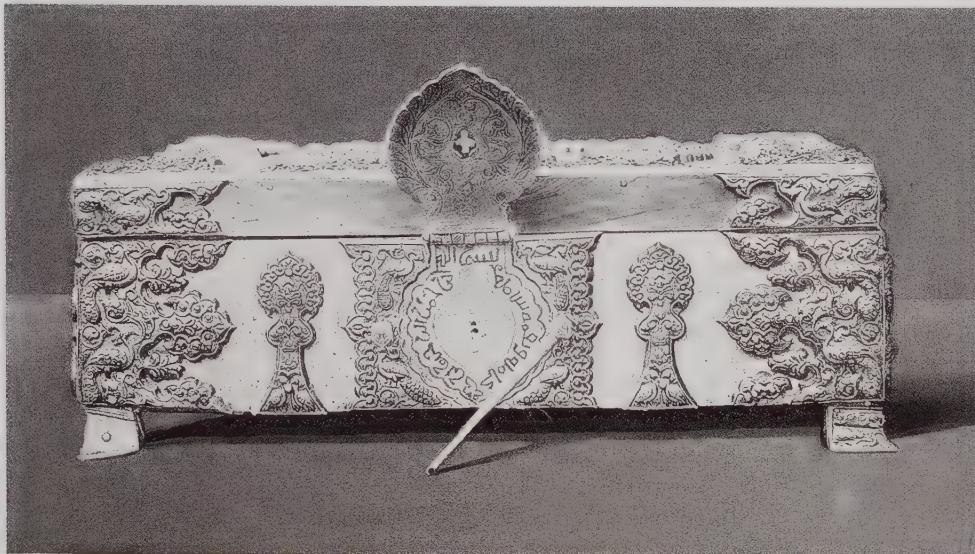
Arms of Tumanbay, ensemble & details, 16th century

The arms and armor of Tumanbay, last Mamluke sultan, all bear his name. The objects, made from Persian Khurasan steel inlaid with gold, and Damascus steel burnished and inlaid with gold, were acquired by the Ottomans.

This plate armor for a horse's head, made of steel inlaid with gold, dates to the Ottoman period. Prisse regards it as a clumsy piece of work and describes it as being the antithesis of Tumanbay's equipment.



Armor for a horse's head



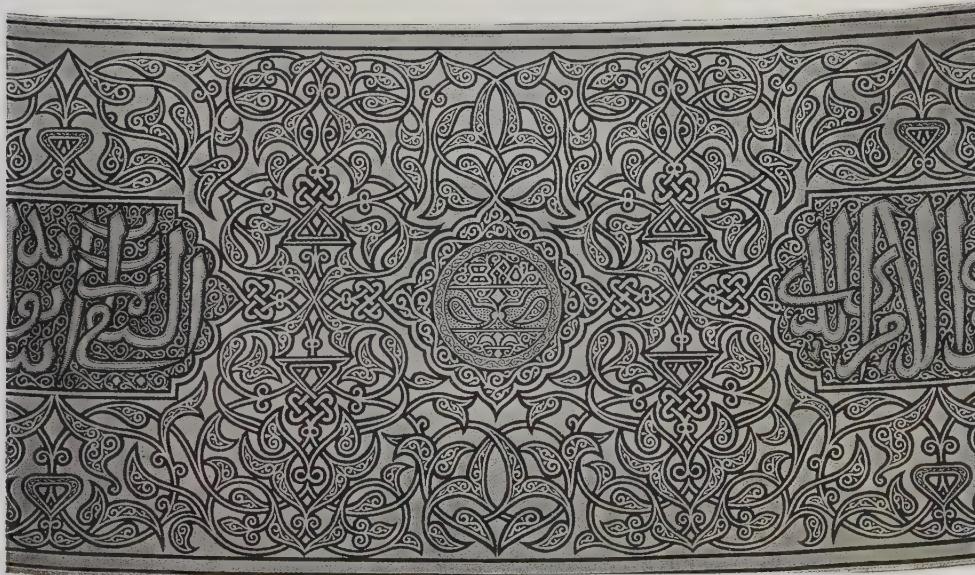
Ivory Chest with silver appliqués, Bayeux Cathedral, 12th century

This chest, found in Bayeux Cathedral in Normandy, contains the chasuble, stole, and maniple of Saint Regnobert. Kufic inscriptions reveal its oriental origin. Prisse expounds on routes the object may have traveled between Egypt and France.

Probably commissioned by one of Sultan Baybars' eunuchs in Damascus, the main center for Mamluke metal work. It adheres to Mediterranean (Greco-Roman) tradition as opposed to the equally popular Sassanian design.



Gilded bronze lamp, tomb of Sultan Baybars, 13th century



Ornamental details from an inlaid basin, or sidriya

A type of inlaid basin called sidriya, found in medieval Arab palaces. Demand for them was significant enough to warrant local production. The majority of metal workers in medieval Egypt were Copts.

Although small copper trays, like this 15th-century model, are usually thought to be made by Arabs from Egypt, Prisse asserts that this one originated in a large village near Venice where Muslim captives and workers continued to practice their craft.



Small copper tray, 15th century

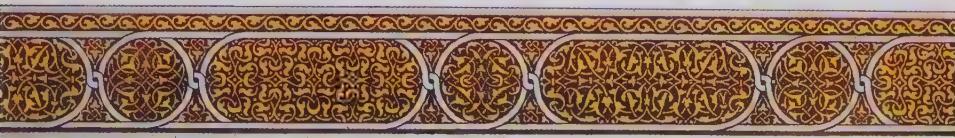
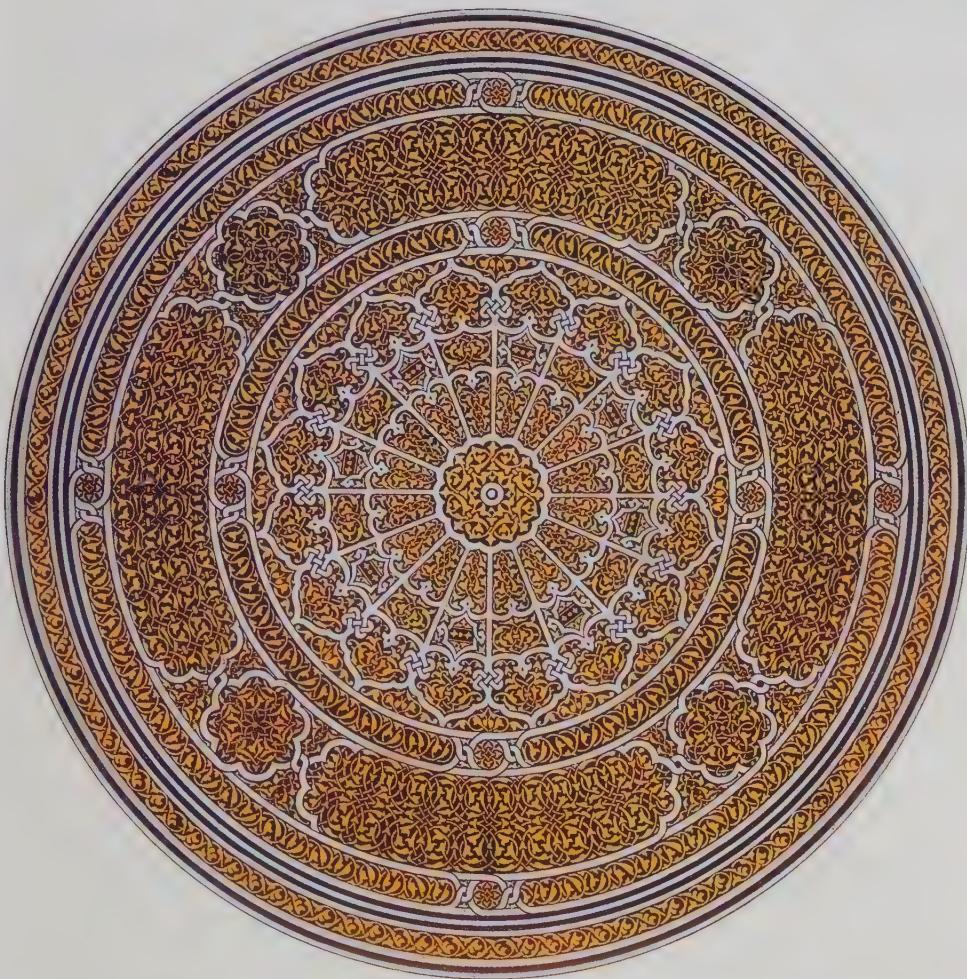


Brass tray, 16th century

This 16th-century brass tray engraved in points is in line with prevailing Persian designs. Although designs were transported from one place to another, Arab Egyptian designs adhered quite rigidly to geometric outlines.



Tinned copper tray, 16th century



Inlaid bronze tray

The inlay/damascene featured in this bronze tray is formed by setting a gold or silver thread in a furrow. It can either be filed down, or as in this case, left in relief. The other method for inlay is executed by applying gold or silver leaf between raised metal lines.

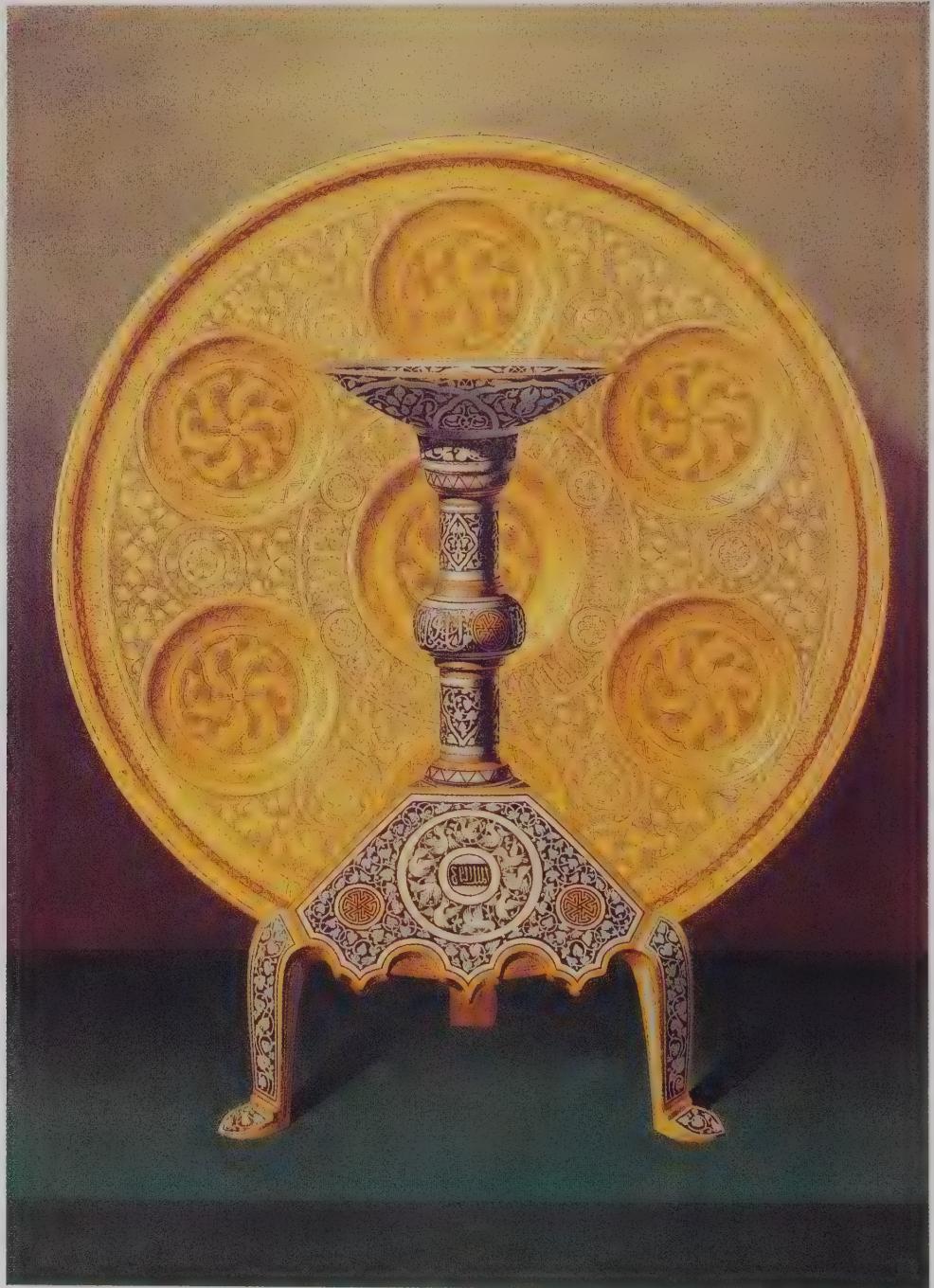


Metal hand mirrors, back



Tinned copper vase, ornamental details

Ornamental details, particularly the lotus flower, reveal the vessel's origin and age. Inspired by Chinese motifs and set in the frame of three overlapping three-leaf clovers, this lotus motif first appeared in Egypt during Qalawaun's reign.



These objects are ornamented and inscribed with inlaid silver and gold. The candlestick, inspired by a Western model, could balance the tray, possibly inlaid with mother of pearl.

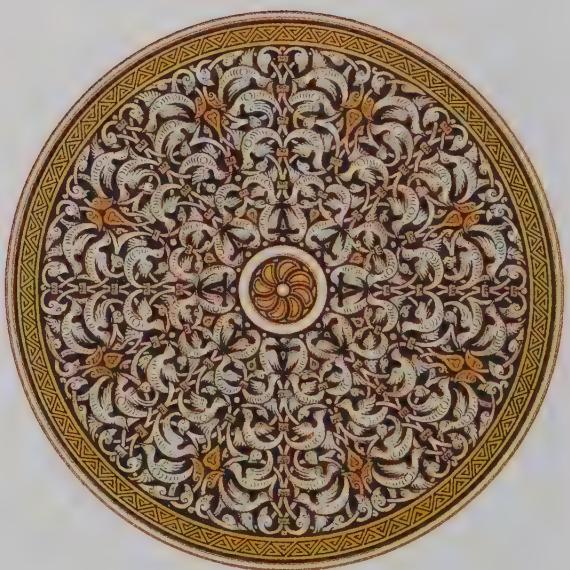
Candlestick and alcarraza tray, furnishings of Sultan Qalawaun, 13th century



Basin, or sidriya, furnishings of Sultan Qalawaun, 13th century

The sidriya reveals how inlay was used even for ornamenting utensils. A long and beautiful legend is engraved on the bulge in Naskhi script. Frolicking ducks adorn the arabesques that surround Qalawaun's silver-inlaid coat of arms.

A typically Mamluke inlaid box and tray of Sultan Qalawaun; a central star or rosette is encircled by complex interlacing patterns that include stylized birds. The lions with human heads along the base represent the patron's royal status.

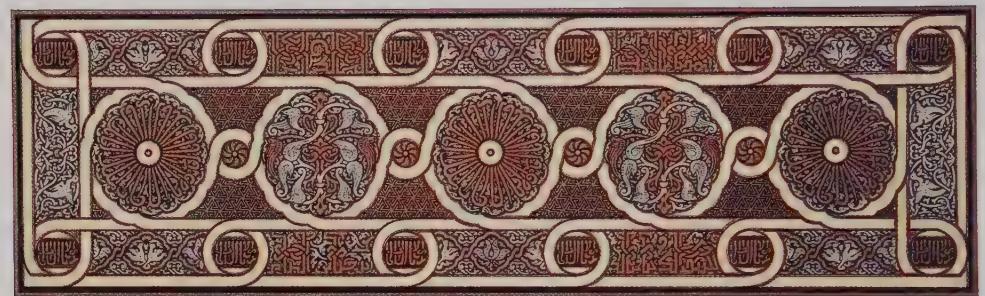


Inlaid chest and tray furnishings of Sultan Qalawaun, 13th century

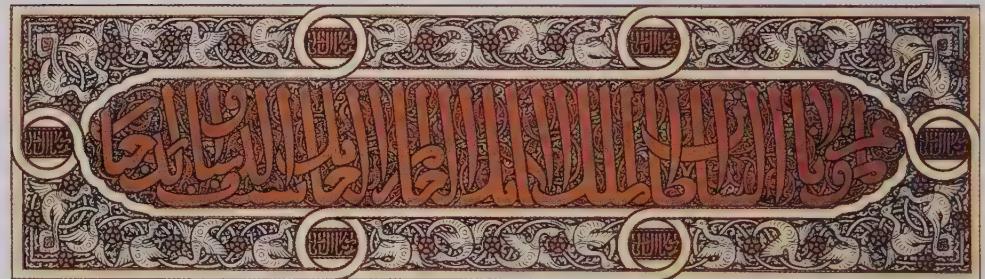


Candlesticks, furnishings of Sultan Qalawaun, 13th century

These candlesticks adhered to a rigid canon. The overall height needed to equal the base's diameter. In contrast to contemporary Persian examples, the sides were very straight. Naskhi script and the appropriate blazon were essential design components.



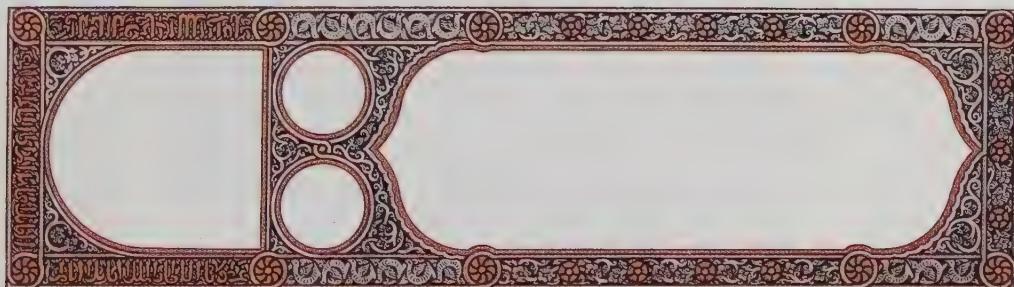
The writing case of Bahri Sultan Sha'aban provides wonderful insight into the ritual of a royal audience. It would be carried ceremoniously in the procession which followed the katib (the sultan's secretary) by his favorite palace emir.



Writing case of Bahri Sultan Sha'aban, details, 14th century



The writing case of Bahri Sultan Sha'aban is quite large and artistically designed. Prisse dissected the object to explore its facets. Designs are dominated by birds and arabesques.



Writing case of Bahri Sultan Sha'aban, details, 14th century



Prisse chose to include these two copper sidriyas to convey varying degrees of richness. Neither is particularly precious but they provide a reminder of daily life. They were designed to contain sherbets and other refreshments.



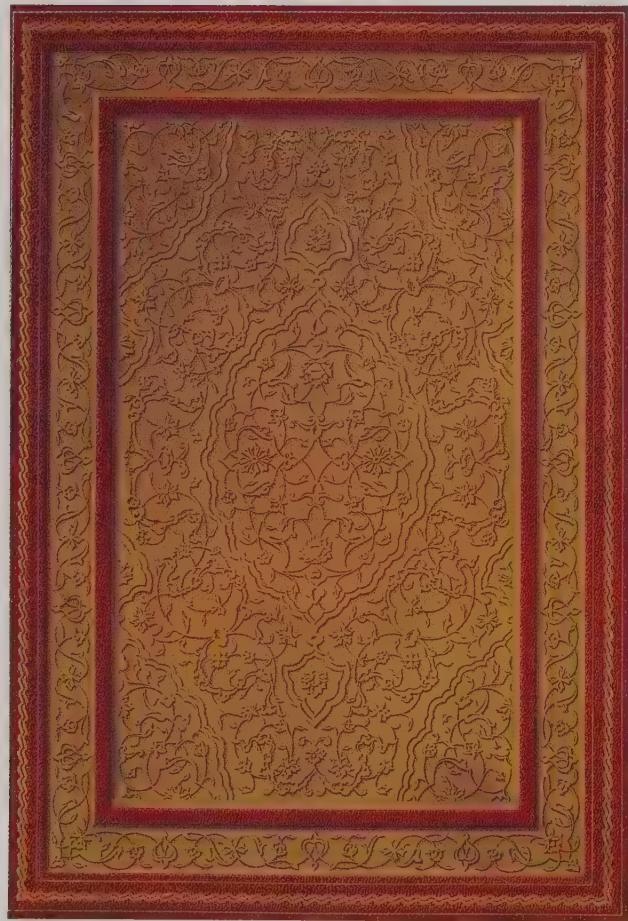
Copper basins, or sidriyas



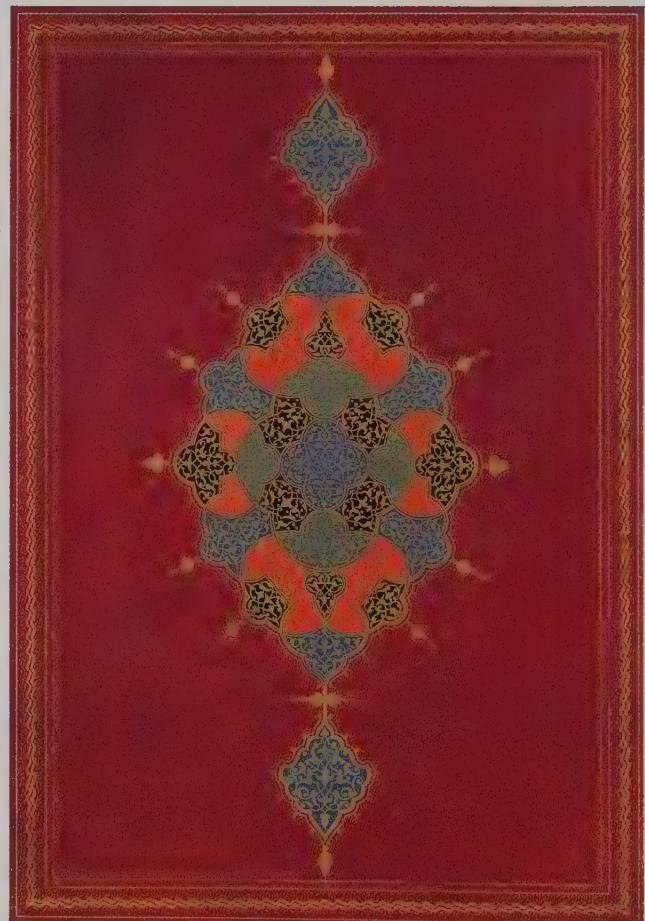
Vessel inlaid with bronze

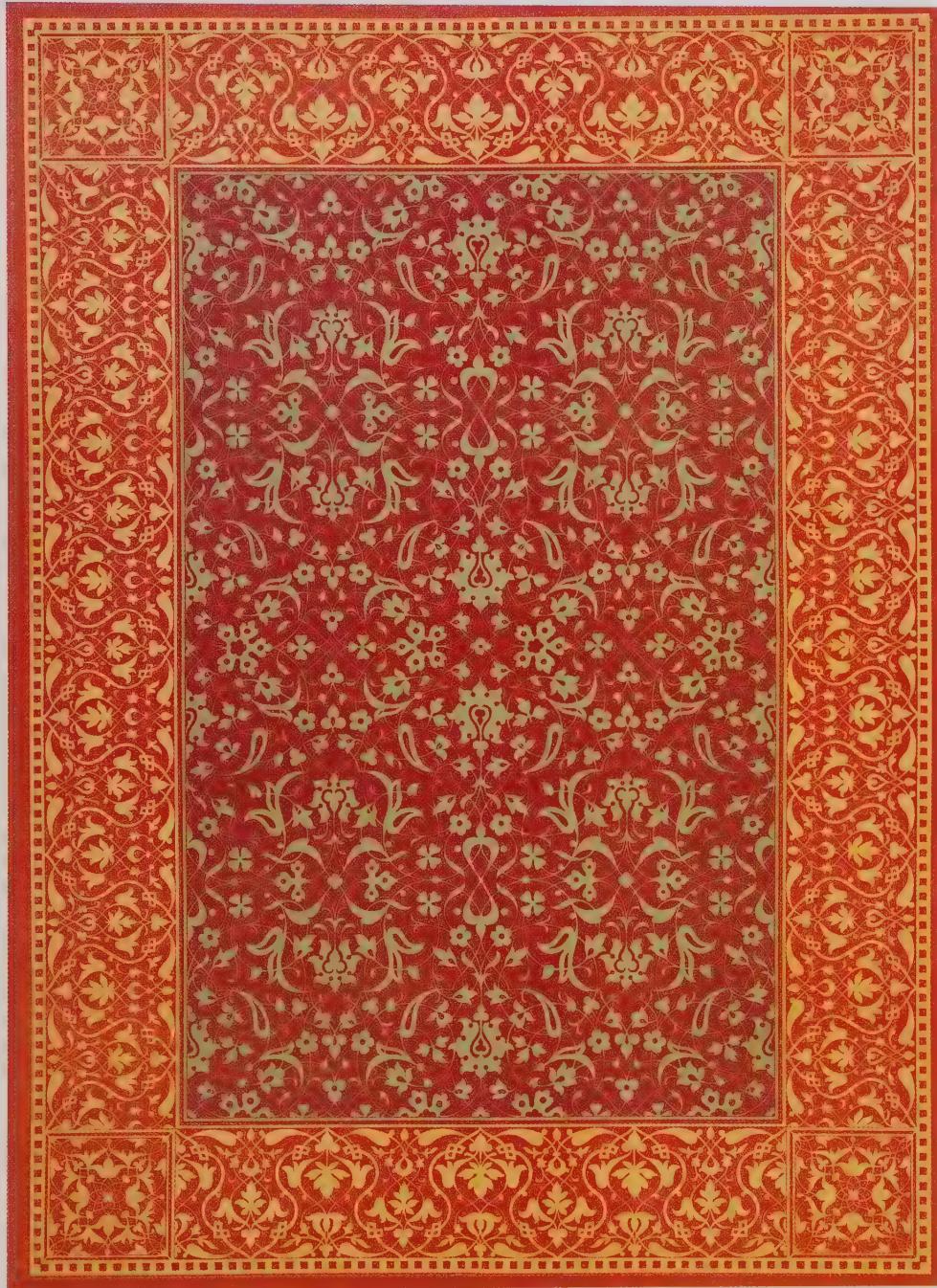
A decorated vessel inlaid with bronze displays an unusual design dominated by winged sphinxes and ancient monsters that resemble manticores, all set within an Andalusian-style geometric pattern. It was at one point in the possession of the Order of the Templars.

Protective bookbinding, like this 16th-century example formed of board (left) and endpaper (right), can be traced to Coptic art. Papyrus paste boards formed the base, with leather covers attached. Tooling techniques were adapted to suit Islamic aesthetic preferences.



Bookbinding board & endpaper, 16th century





Paper cuttings, 18th century

Manuscripts were decorated with paper cuttings like this late 18th-century example. Colored papers were cut with a knife, half a dozen at a time, then pasted on backgrounds of different colors, sometimes on silver or gilded paper.

Prisse describes these late 18th-century decorative paper cuttings as being typical of Turkish artists "in the rather clumsy style of this period of decadence."



Paper cuttings, 18th century





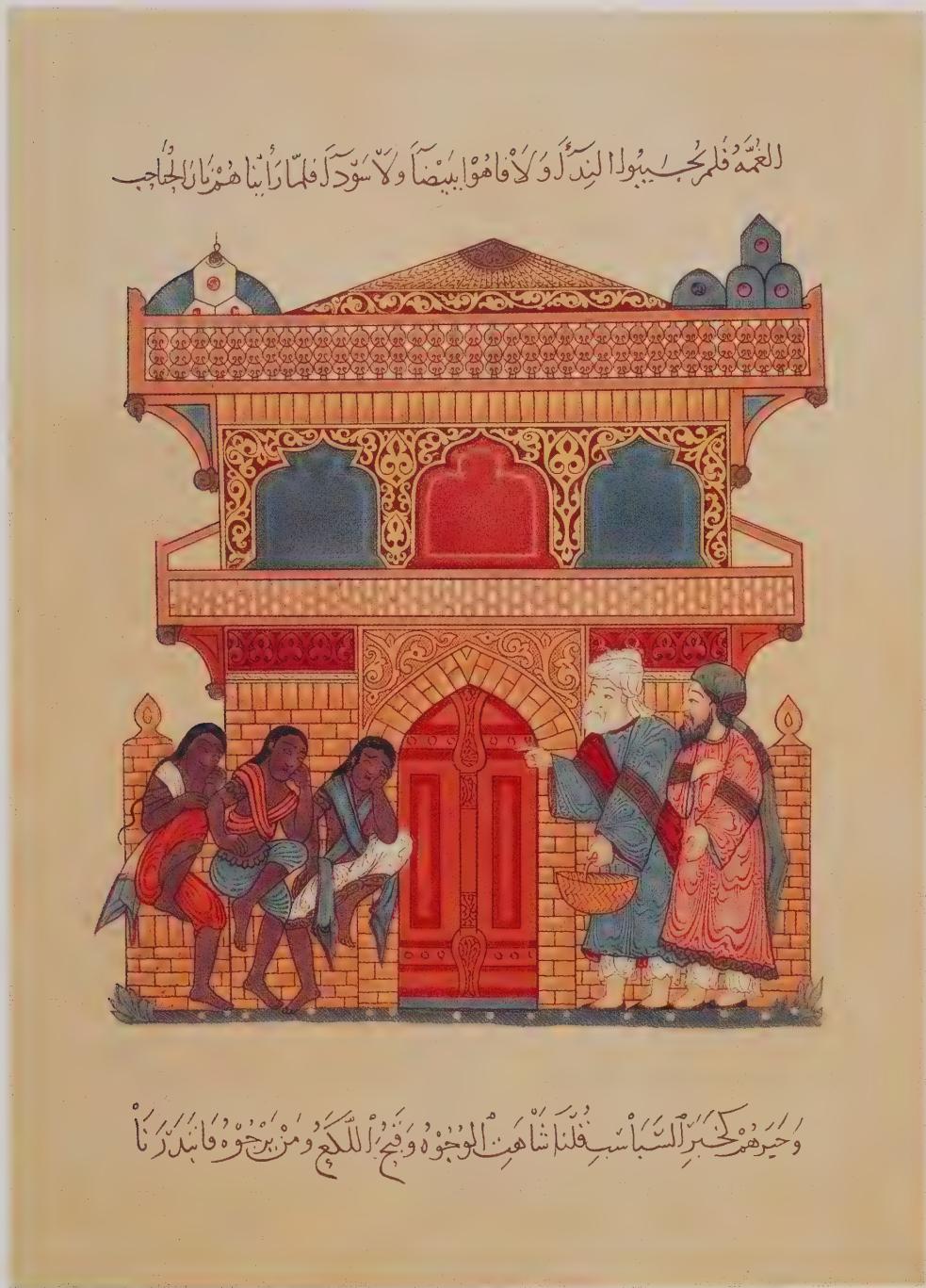
Maqamat al-Hariri, frontispiece, 13th century

Prisse devotes several plates to illustrations from the Schefer copy of *Maqamat al-Hariri* conserved in Paris. The artist, Yehya al-Wasiti, illustrated the manuscript in 1236. Its frontispiece incorporates natural and imaginary animals as well as angels, all within a foliated scroll.



These illustrations from *Maqamat al-Hariri* display fascinating realism. The upper image is dictated by a swirling movement while the camel is barely noticeable. The lower illustration captures the rhythm of a caravan by exploring the necks of camels—some upright, others work towards the grass.

Scenes from *Maqamat al-Hariri*, 13th century



Maqamat al-Hariri, a chalet, 13th century

This small chalet from Maqamat al-Hariri features three thoughtful Indian ascetics. Technical influences of Indian art are revealed in the three-quarter view, characterized by a protruding far eye in the bearded old man.



Maqamat al-Hariri, Caravan on the March, 13th century



Quran, mosque of Qaysun, 14th century

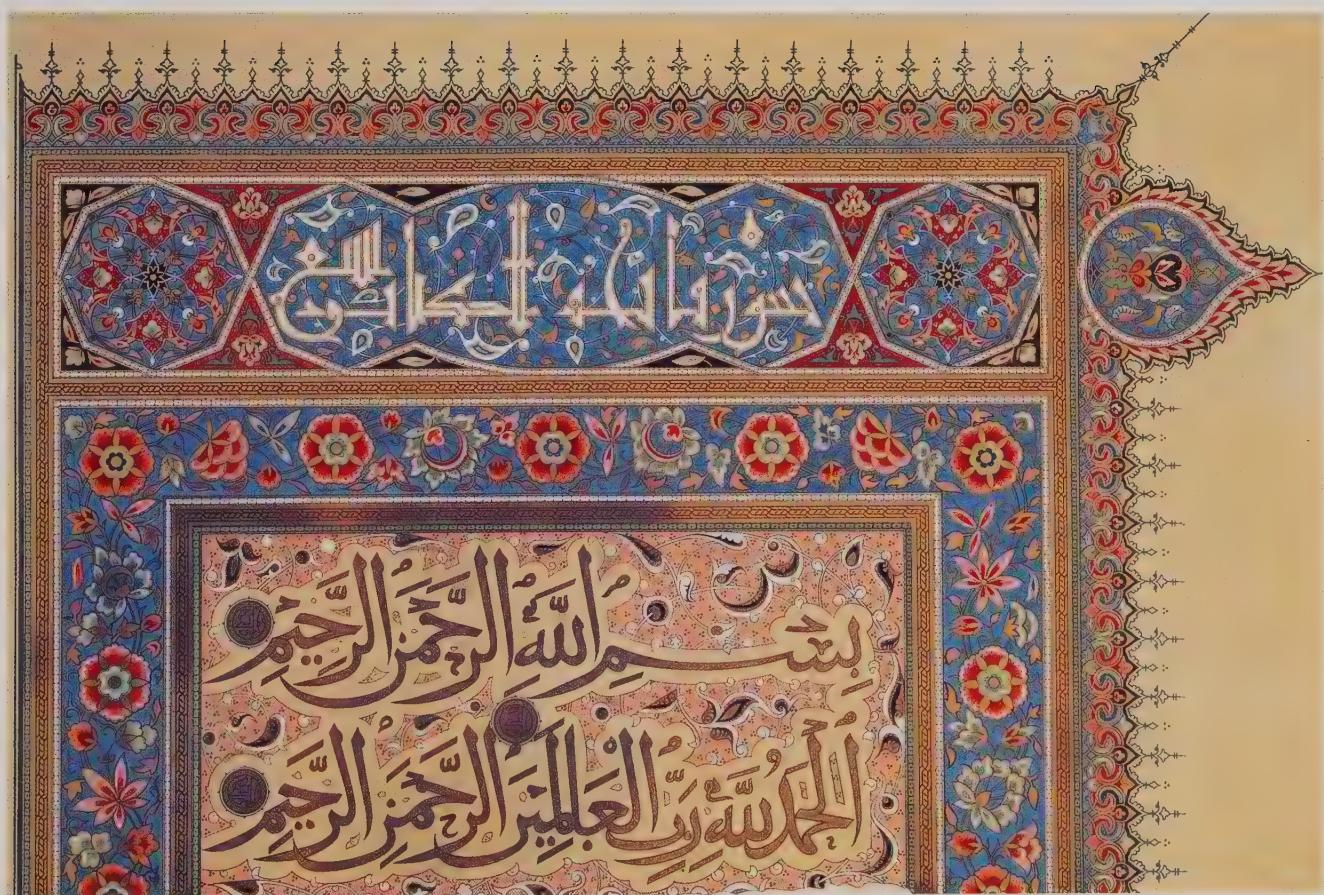
The significance of the Quran to Muslims invigorated many stages in the evolution of calligraphy and illuminations. This 14th-century Quran from the Qaysun mosque displays central polychromatic interlace designs ringed by a border of open-work ornaments adorned with cabochons.



The last page of Sultan Barquq's Quran marks the introduction of a new blueprint for manuscript illumination. A geometric composition divides the central rectangle in half, forming circular segments. Previously, designs featured central star-polygons or some other centrifugal device.

Quran, mosque of Sultan Barquq, last page, 14th century

According to Prisse, this Quran, found in the tomb of Sultan al-Ghuri, belonged to the waqf (endowment) of al-Ghuri, and was written and illuminated at the same time as the mausoleum was built.

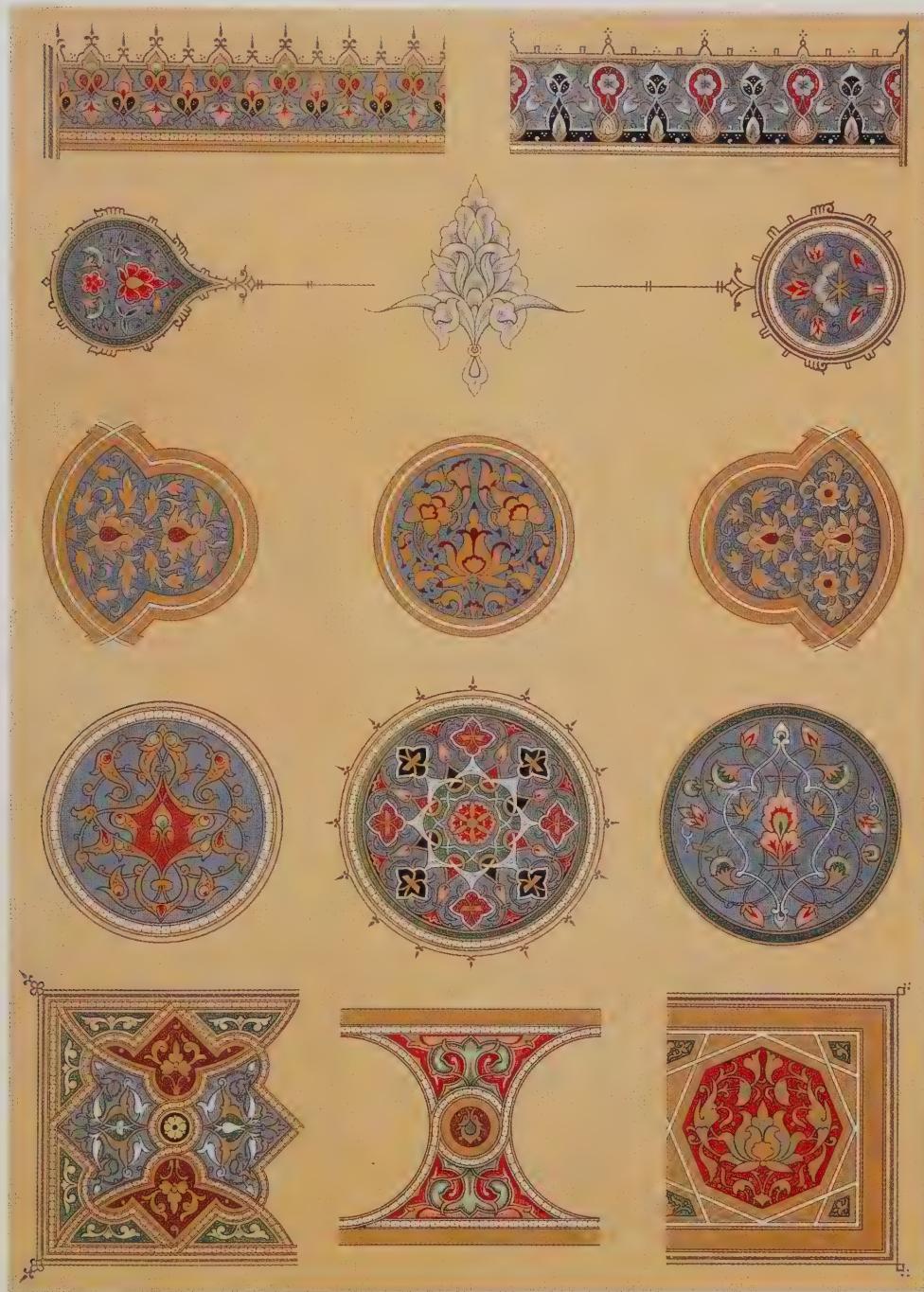


Quran, tomb of Sultan al-Ghuri, 16th century

The decoration from al-Ghuri's Quran captures fundamental Arab designs. The artist and illuminator were the same person, hence the integrated nature of calligraphy and ornamentation.



Decoration from a Quran, tomb of Sultan al-Ghuri, 16th century



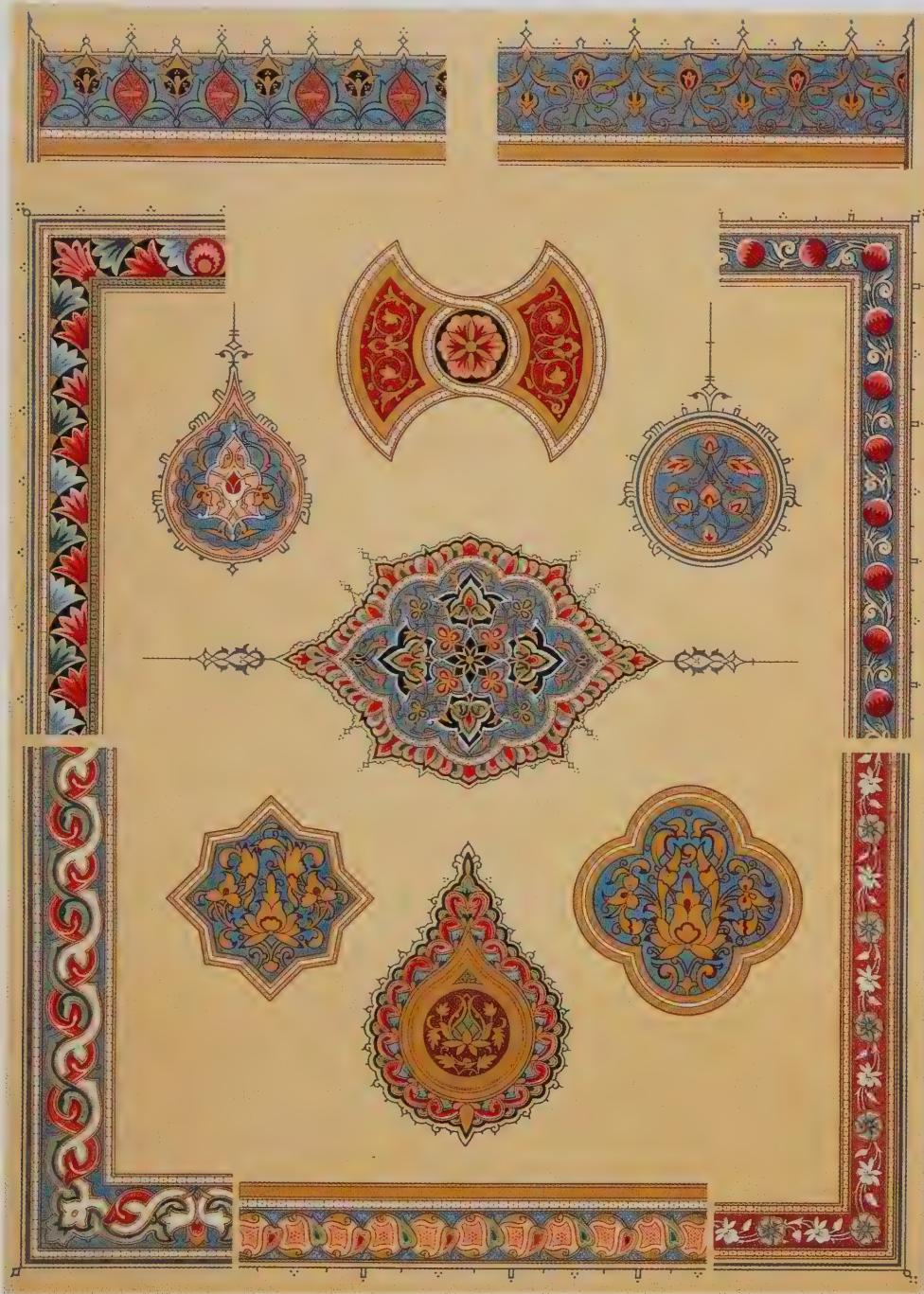
Decorative elements from a Quran, tomb of Sultan al-Ghuri, 16th century

According to Prisse, these elements confirm that the quality of illumination declined between the reigns of Barquq and al-Ghuri; he insists, however, that calligraphy achieved new heights.



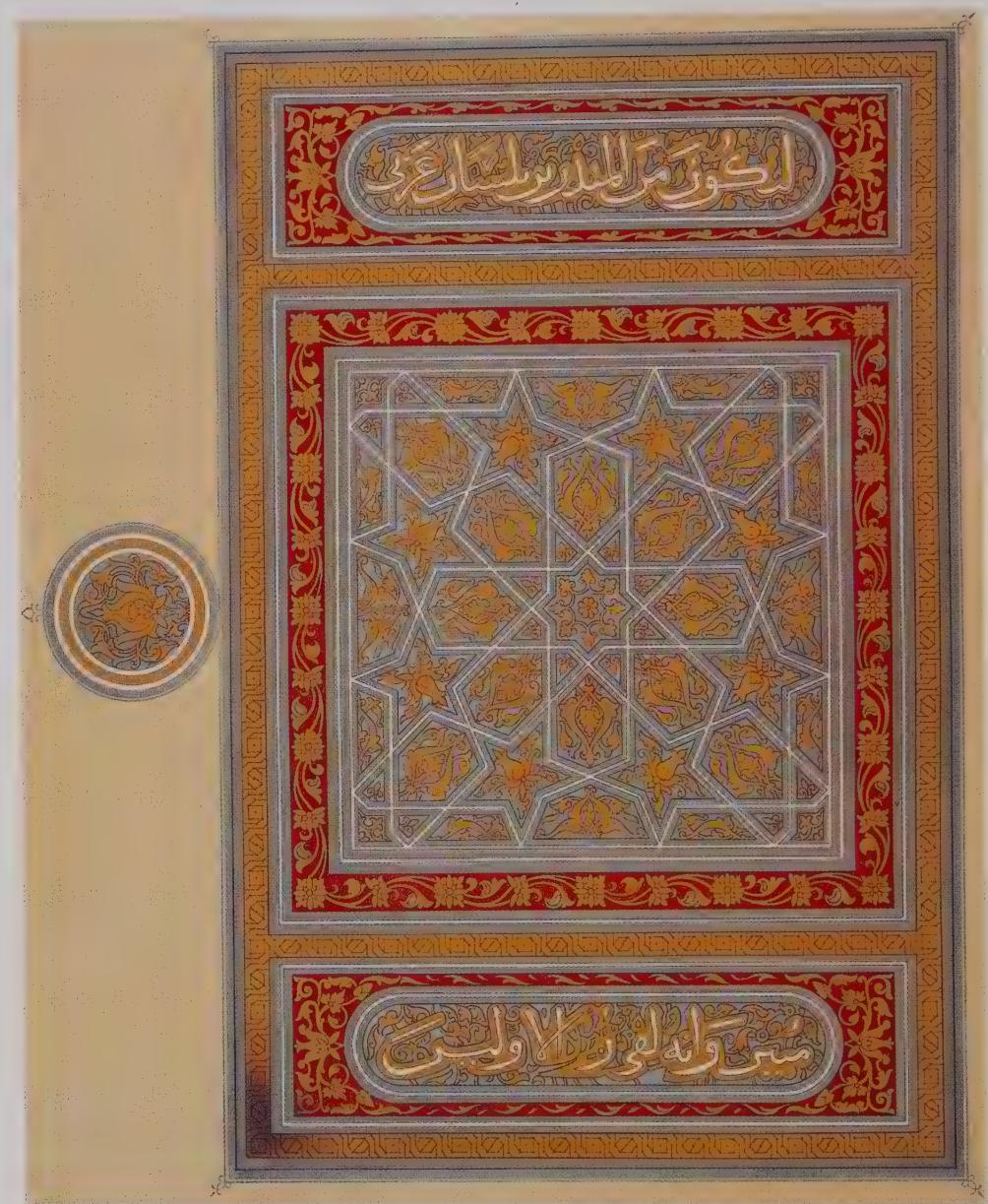
This Quran, found among others in the tomb of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, has a consistently Arab design with Byzantine and Persian flourishes.

Decorative elements from a Quran, tomb of Sultan al-Ghuri, 16th century



Decorative elements from a Quran, tomb of Sultan al-Ghuri, 16th century

Al-Ghuri's tomb housed a number of relics, like the mukhula (box of khul) and subha (rosary) of the Prophet Muhammad. Due to its religious significance, Prisse suggests a comparative study of ornamentation of both the tomb and its Qurans.

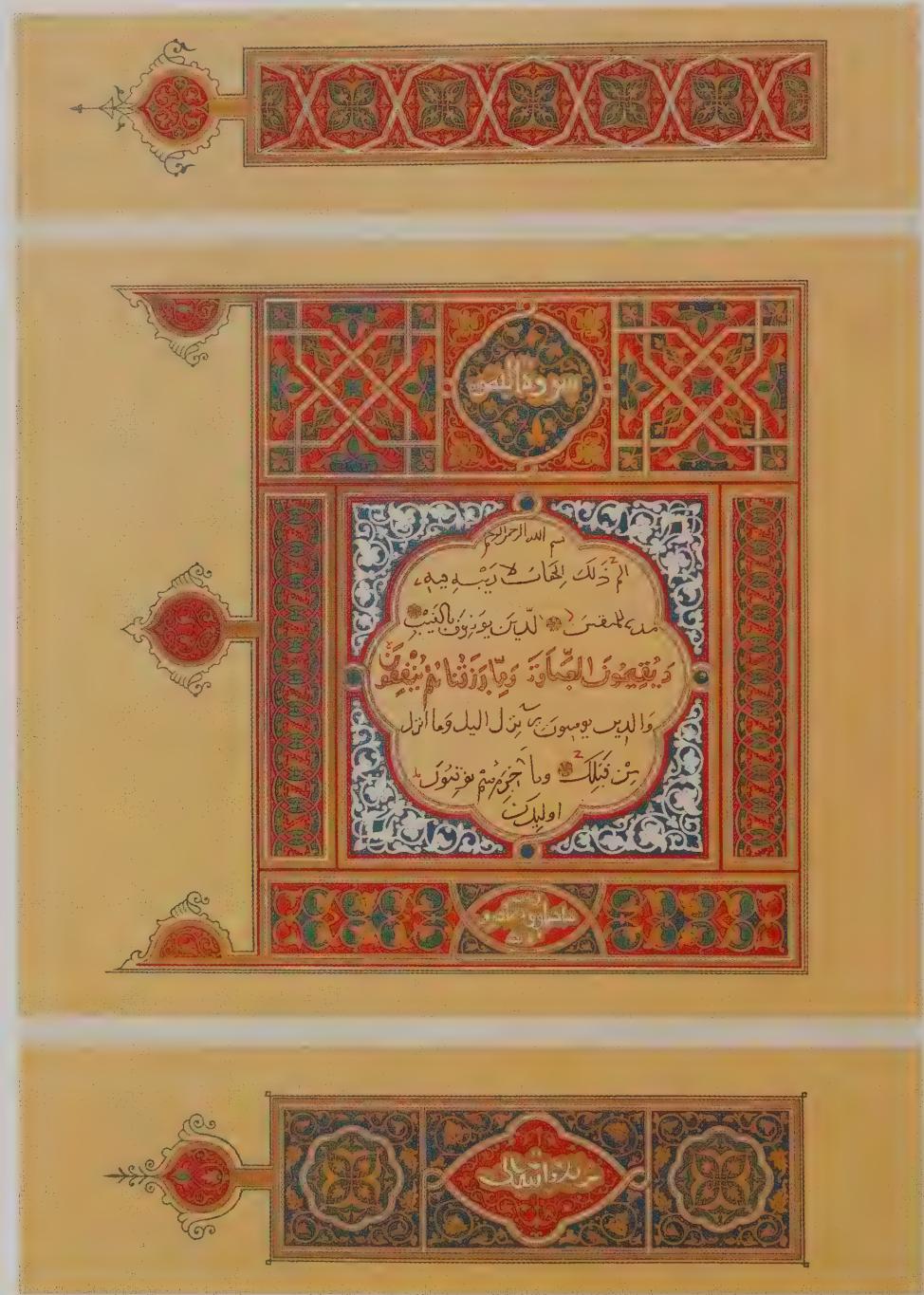


Page from an illuminated Quran, 16th century



Quran, frontispiece & details, 17th century

The details captured from this 17th-century Quran frontispiece are indicative of a cohesive design scheme for the Quranic volume. Intricate, superimposed geometric patterns are united by very neat arabesques. Roundels are positioned in typical Persian style.



A true amalgam of styles, this Quran is characterized by decorative details which draw associations with North African geometric designs. The vibrant interpretation of design pushes the text out at the viewer.

Quran, ornamental details, 17th century



Quran, ornamental details, 17th century

This 17th-century Quran unveils an array of designs, complexly intertwined arabesques contrast with sparse ones. Its designs are distinct from other 17th-century manuscripts depicted.

A Maghribi Quran presented to Muhammad Abu Dahab in 1768 by Sidi Muhammad, the Sultan of Morocco. It features a watermark of a crowned lion holding a sword and arrows, pursued by horsemen. Holland paper was used, a bizarre choice of material for a Quran.



Maghribi Quran, double frontispiece, from the mosque of Muhammad Abu Dahab, 18th century

The initial pages of the same Maghribi Quran highlight the relationship between calligraphy and ornament, both characterized by their delicacy. The artist has played with the coloring of these facing pages.



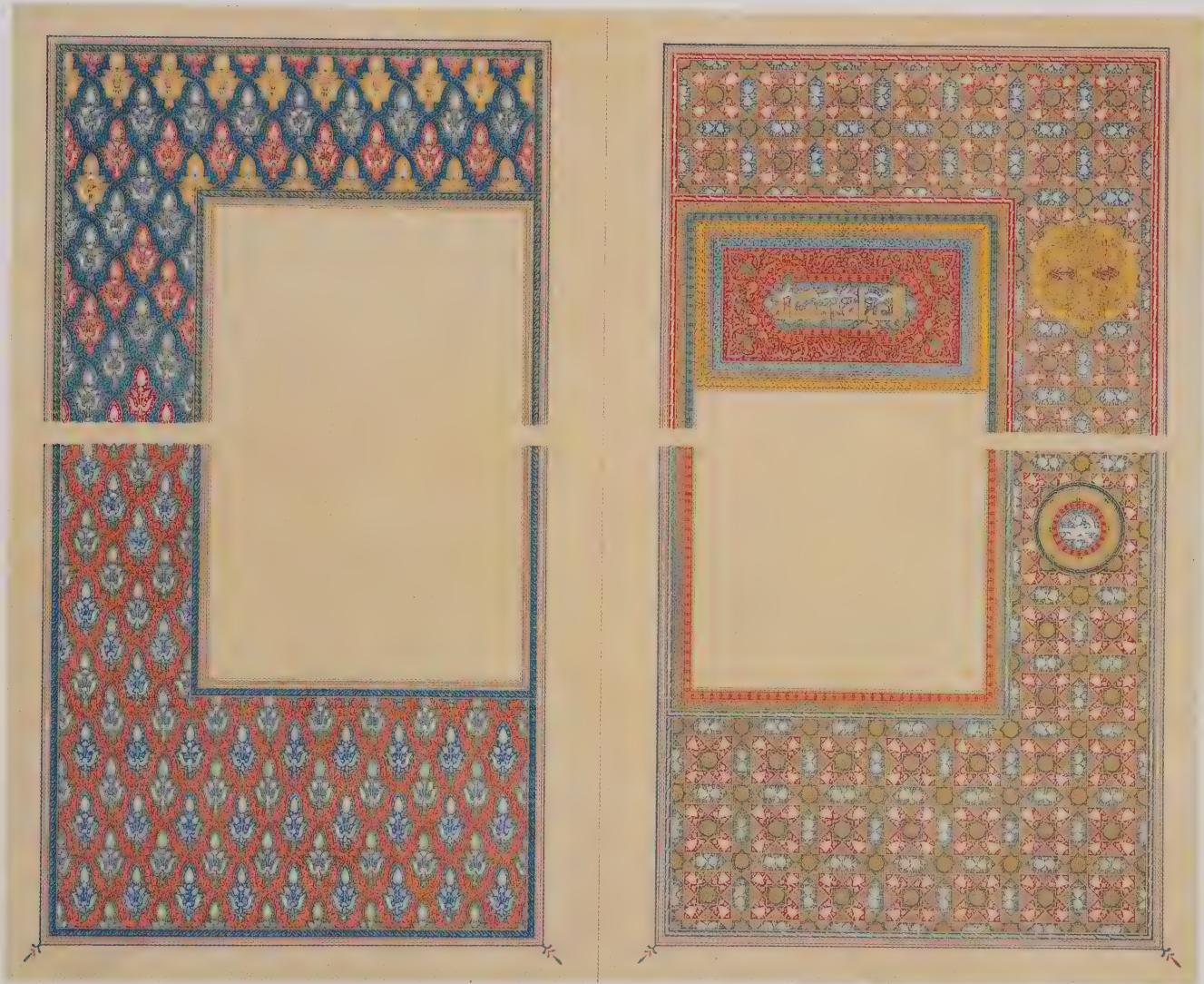
Maghribi Quran, first pages, from the mosque of Muhammad Abu Dahab, 18th century

The overall layout of the same Maghribi Quran consists of a series of twin facing pages. Each set is adorned with arabesques and small detailing. These designs are gilded in the same color. Variations are made in the base colors.



Maghribi Quran, twin pages, from the mosque of Muhammad Abu Dahab, 18th century

Decoration from the Maghribi Quran explores how designs are varied with color. The frame, essentially blue, is surrounded by gold in one case, chrome-ringed by gold in another, and either emerald green or chemy red in the following plate.



Maghribi Quran, ornamentation, from the mosque of Muhammad Abu Dahab, 18th century

Prisse included these images, which aid his study of the Maghribi Quran, an aesthetic reliant on a combination of arabesques and star grids, to contrast them with ornamentation featured in Egyptian Qurans.



Maghribi Quran, ornamentation, from the mosque of Muhammad Abu Dahab, 18th century

The twin pages in this plate show that the Maghribi Quran did not utilize arabesques to the same extent as was done in Cairo, and that in the Maghrib architectural forms played a more significant role in book ornamentation.



Maghribi Quran, twin pages, from the mosque of Muhammad Abu Dahab, 18th century

Prisse chose to contrast decoration through ornament and color. He did not reproduce text here or in plates 195 and 196. The decoration here features unusual medallions decorated with Chinese motifs.



Maghribi Quran, ornamentation, from the mosque of Muhammad Abu Dahab, 18th century

This twin page from the Maghribi Quran adheres more rigidly to North African aesthetics. Concentric bands ring a central medallion. The page is outlined by subtle lines that soften the overall impact of the animated design.

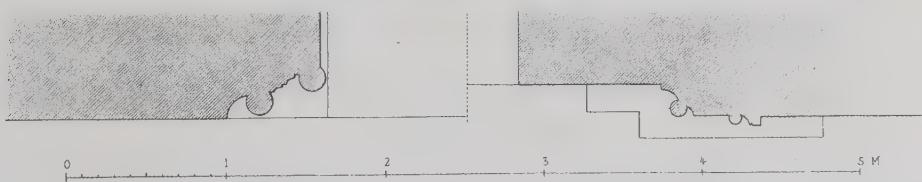
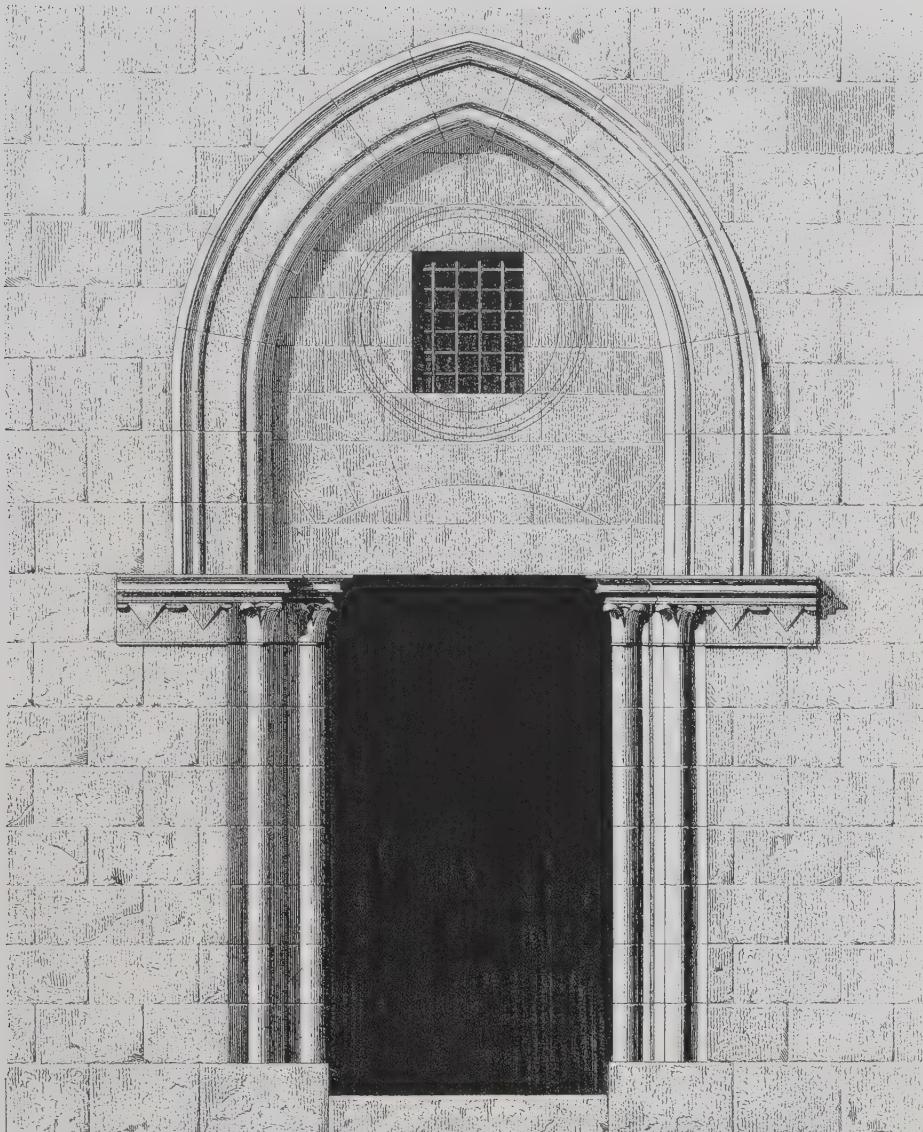


Maghribi Quran, twin pages, from the mosque of Muhammad Abu Dahab, 18th century

Twin pages that include some calligraphy. The transmission of designs from the eastern Islamic world to its western flank is evident in the combination of broad, spindle-like geometric patterns, set in a delicate spectrum of intertwined floral patterns.

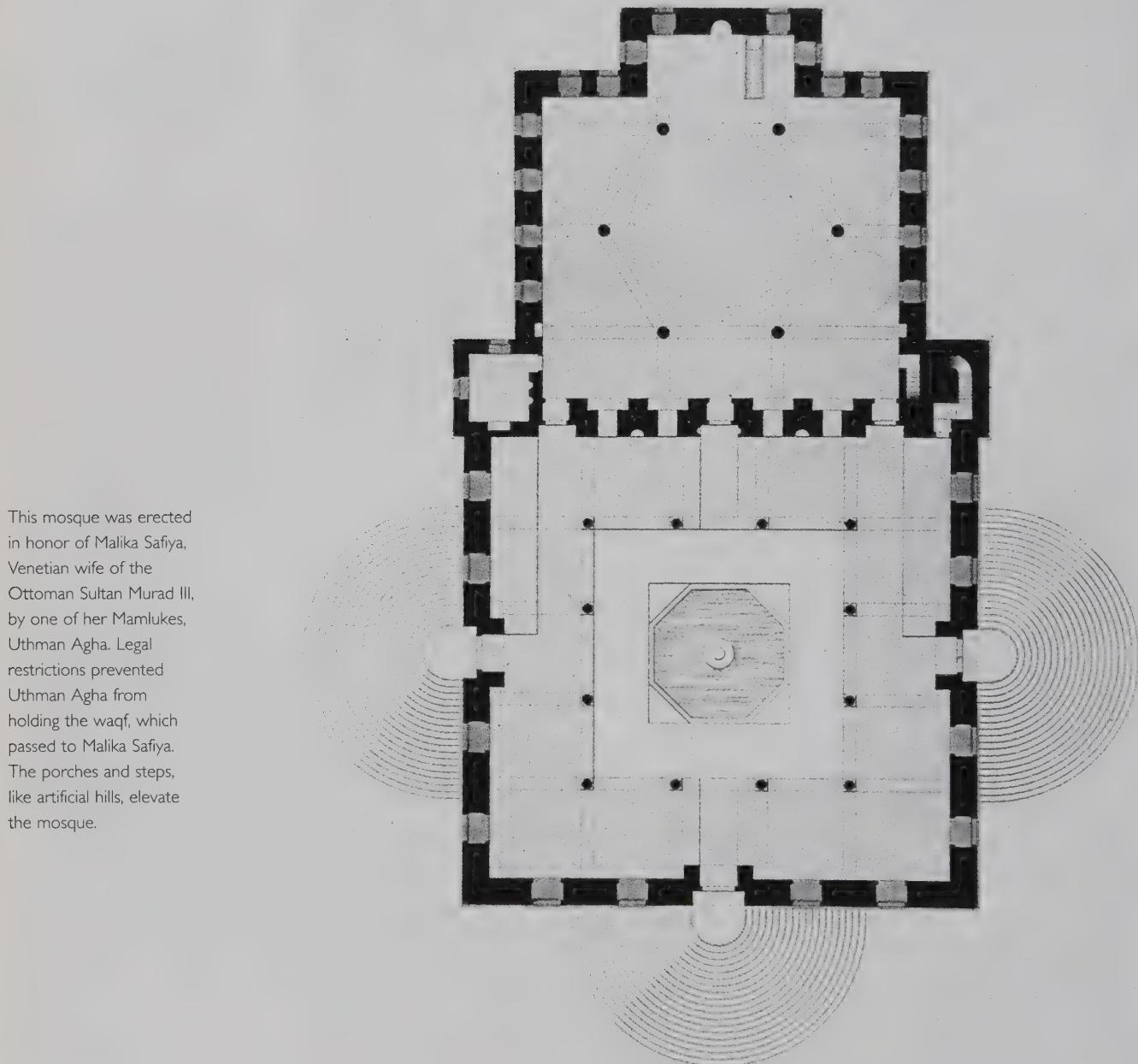


Maghribi Quran, twin pages, from the mosque of Muhammad Abu Dahab, 18th century



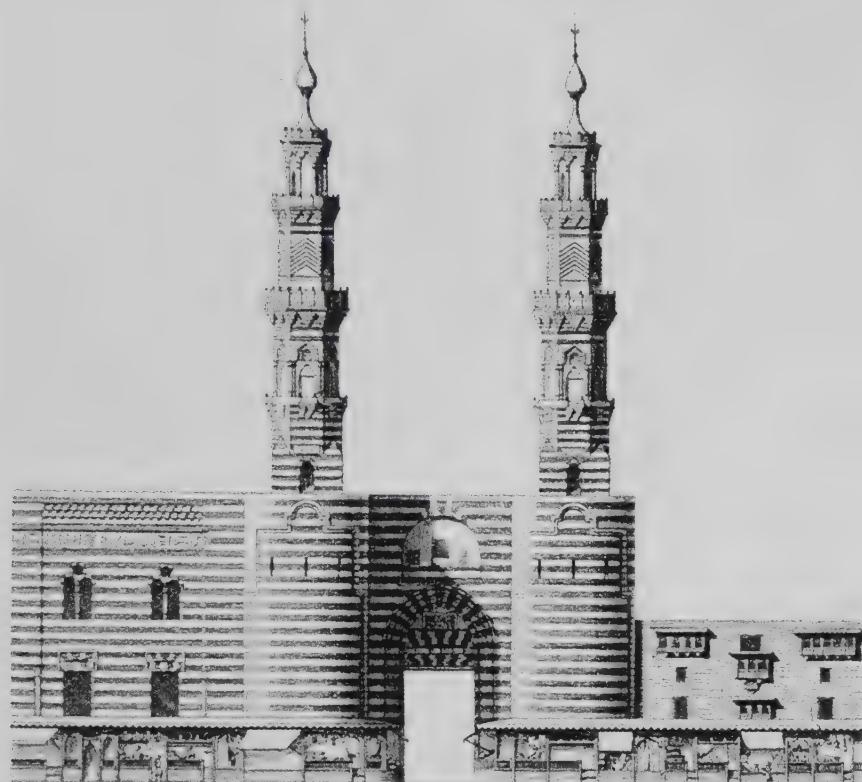
I. Interior door, palace of al-Salih Ayyub Najm-al-Din, in the courtyard of the Nilometer of Roda (1241)

Although al-Salih Ayyub Najm-al-Din's short reign was marred by campaigns in Syria to assert control over renegade governors and his failure to suppress Louis IX in Damietta, he concentrated some effort on erecting a palace in Cairo, an edifice that marks the near end of the Ayyubids. The assimilation of this doorway, which adheres to characteristic Crusader style, symbolized Ayyubid hegemony.



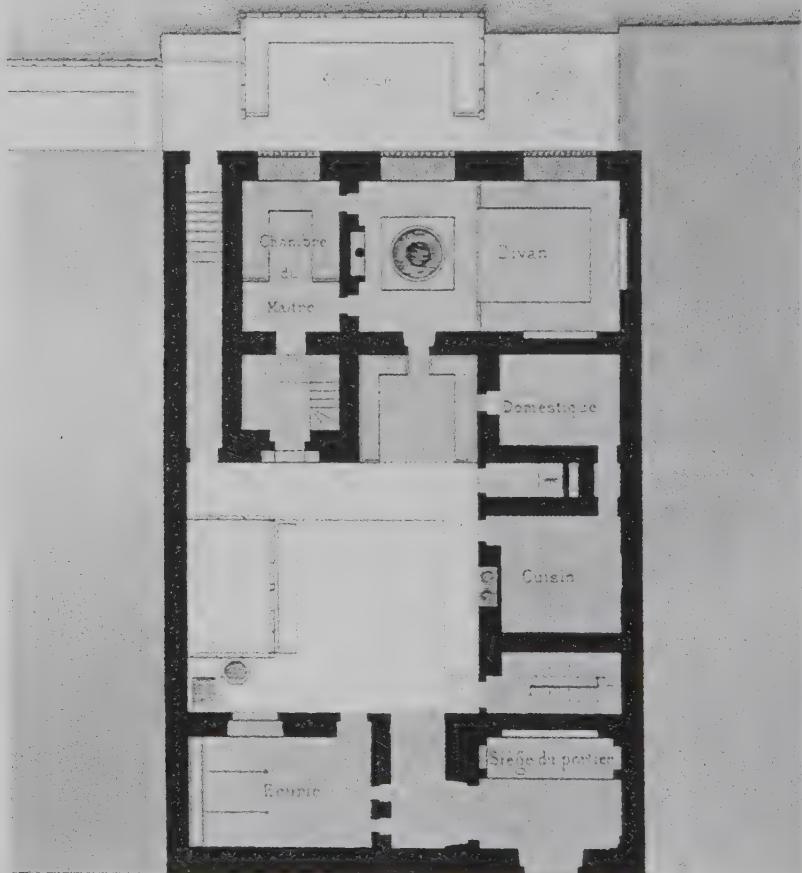
This mosque was erected in honor of Malika Safiya, Venetian wife of the Ottoman Sultan Murad III, by one of her Mamlukes, Uthman Agha. Legal restrictions prevented Uthman Agha from holding the waqf, which passed to Malika Safiya. The porches and steps, like artificial hills, elevate the mosque.

II. Mosque of Malika Safiya (1610)



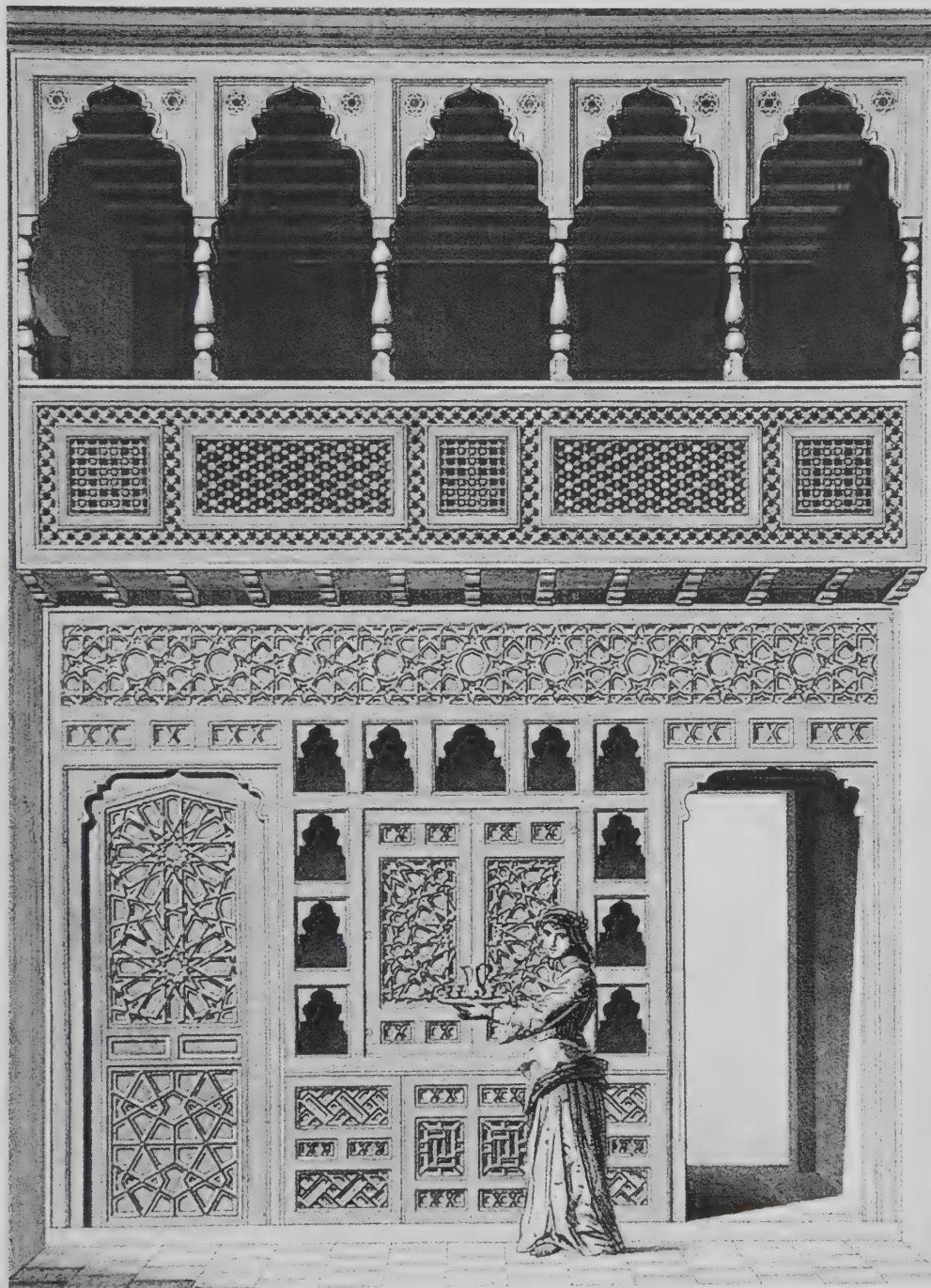
III. Bab Zuwayla, 11th century

Bab Zuwayla, located along the southern side of the city walls, was commissioned by Emir al-Juyush Badr al-Junadi, wazir of Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir Bilah. The gate was made by augmenting the existing battlements and adjoining a great solid glacis of polished granite so smooth that horses could not gain a footing. Prisse relates that the hinge pins of the two swing doors were said to have turned on two pieces of crystal.



From the numerous bridges astride the canal that flowed below the Nilometer of the island of Roda, windows of partially submerged houses could be viewed. It was along this canal that the first palaces and houses were built after Fustat was abandoned.

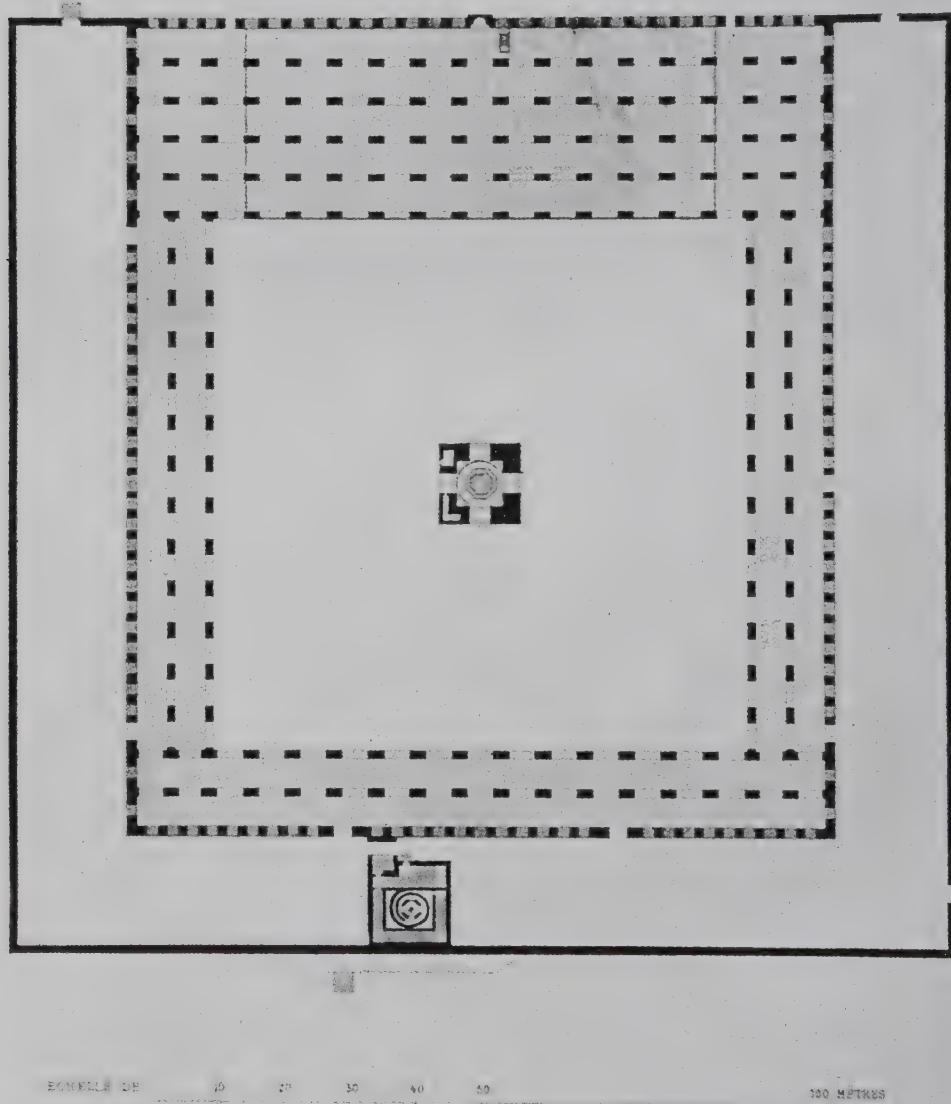
IV. Plan of a small house along a canal



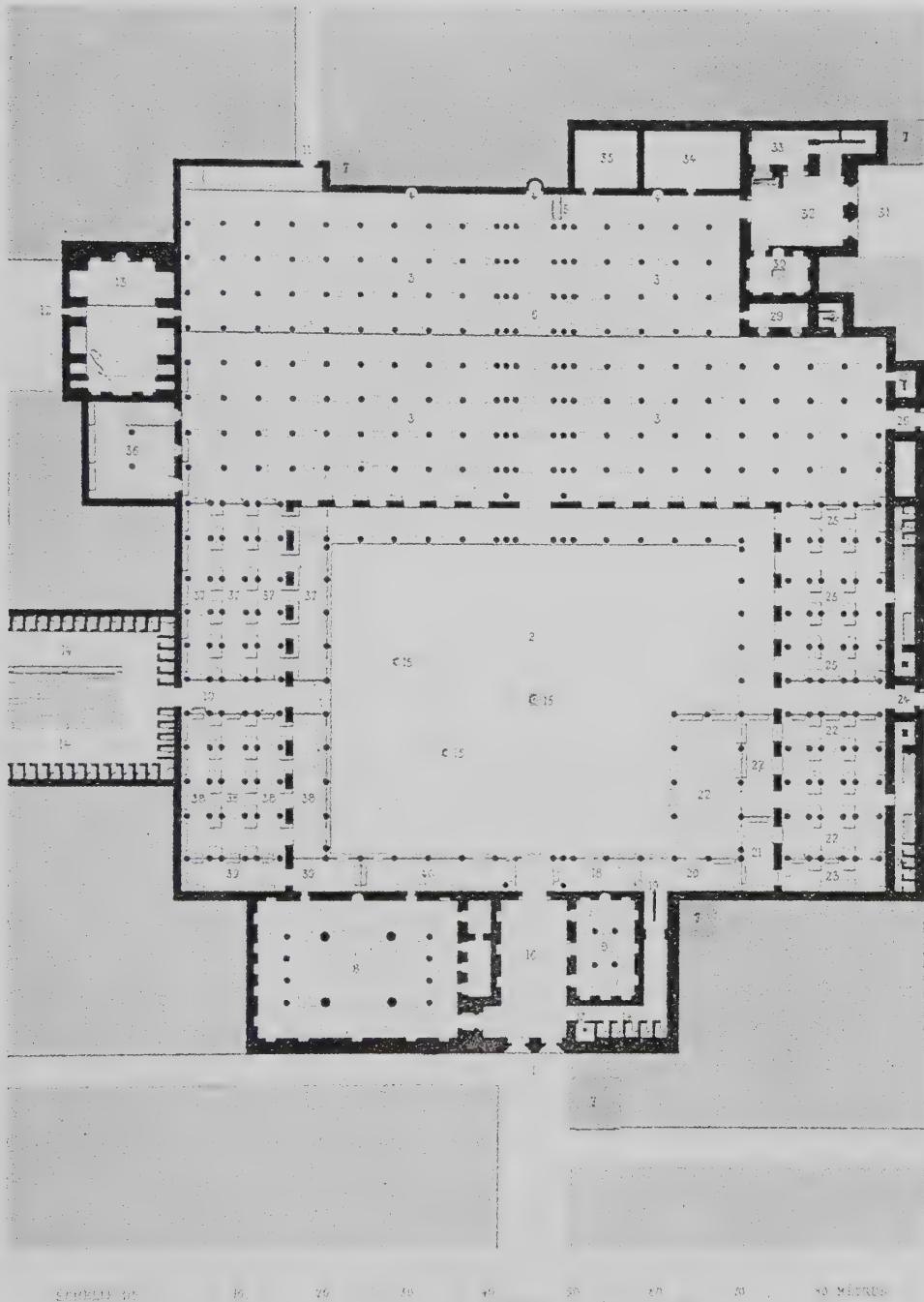
V. Takassir: tribune reserved for women

Mosques, divided into a number of zones, sometimes included upper galleries with separate entrances reserved for women. According to Prisse, this arrangement was probably borrowed from Byzantine churches and transmitted to Arab architects via the Hagia Sophia.

This quintessential congregational mosque plan conveys an austerity typical of architecture before the Fatimid and Mamluke periods. The entire plan covers 162 square meters with a square inner court of 92 square meter. In the center is a fountain, which was protected by a gilded dome that fell in 968. Covered areas include five aisles parallel to the qibla wall and a double arcade on the other three sides of the court.

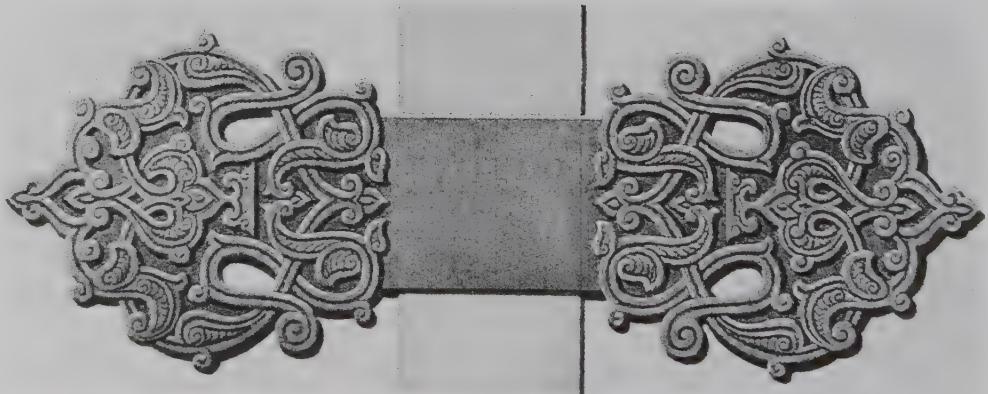
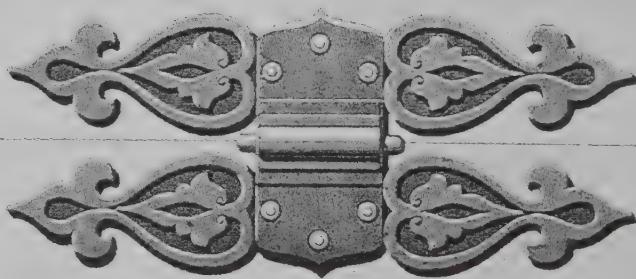


VI. Plan of Ibn Tulun mosque



VII. Plan of al-Azhar mosque

The original al-Azhar adhered to a hypostyle plan. Prisse captured the mosque after centuries of additions were made: the Fatimid arcade around the courtyard; the no longer visible Mamluke exterior mihrab; the three Mamluke madrasas of Taybars, Emir Aqbugha and Jawhar al-Qanqaba'; and the area behind the original mihrab widened under the Ottomans.

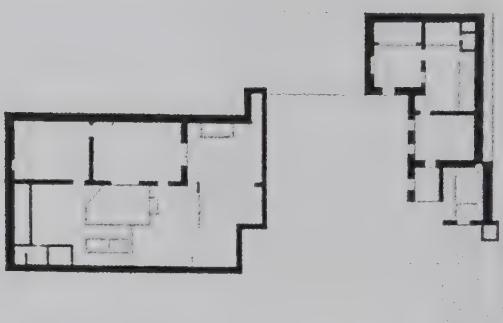
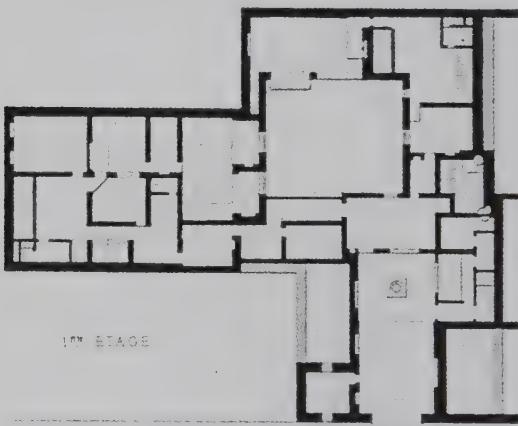


VIII. Door fittings, Sulayman Pasha mosque



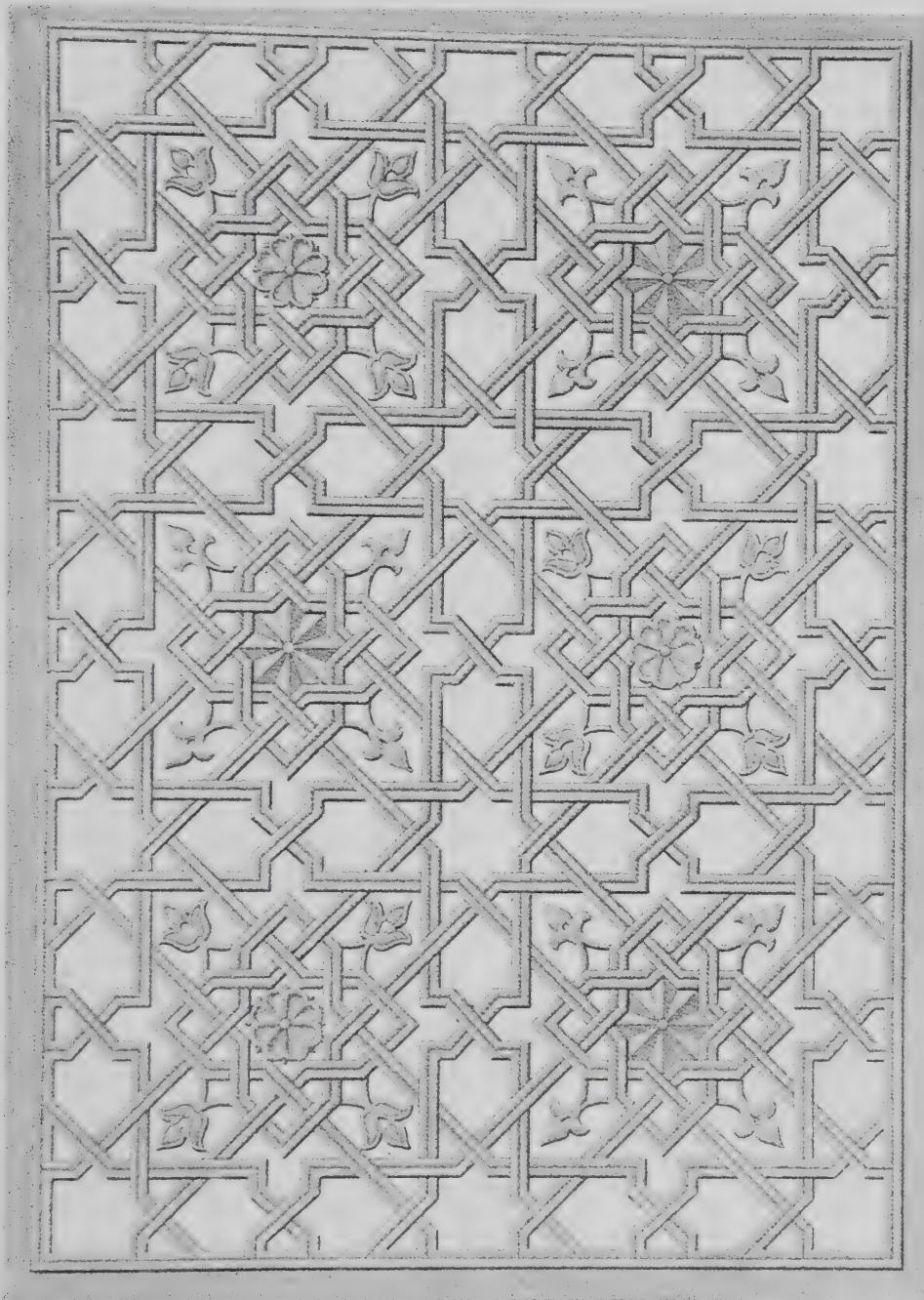
IX. Grille of a sabil, Ottoman period

Ottoman sabis are characterized by ornate iron grille windows. Raised by corbels, framed by contrasting straight lines and floral flourishes, this example displays an intricate iron design articulated by matte and glossy surfaces.

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TERRASSE - CHAUSSEE

X. Plan of a private house



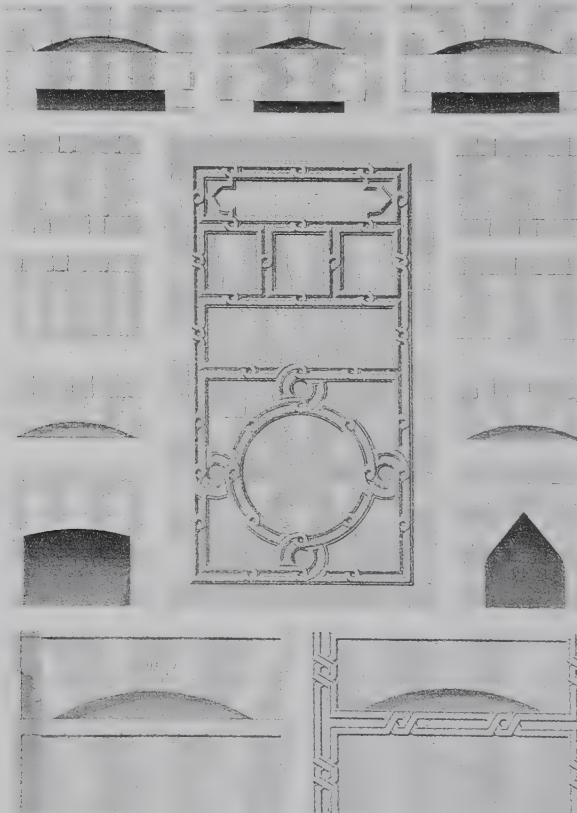
XI. Qasr al-Fadawi, bronze window grille

Overlooking the two liwans, or elevated areas of the standard mandara (reception area) are windows that are here ornamented with iron or bronze grilles that feature geometric florated patterns. In other cases, there were intricate wood lattices.



Above: The door, strengthened and domed by corbeling and a row of muqarnases, displays the austere aesthetic potential of muqarnas design in sturdy fortress architecture.

Below: A central panel, frames and balustrades, all exemplify how brick and limestone masonry were used. Masonry, fundamental to foundations, played decorative as well as functional roles; various combinations of brick and limestone were employed. The most ordinary were made of alternating squares and rectangles. The more ornate examples relied on closely fitted zigzag carved blocks.



(Above) XII. Fortified door of a house, near Mahmud Janum. (Below) XIII. Comparative masonry

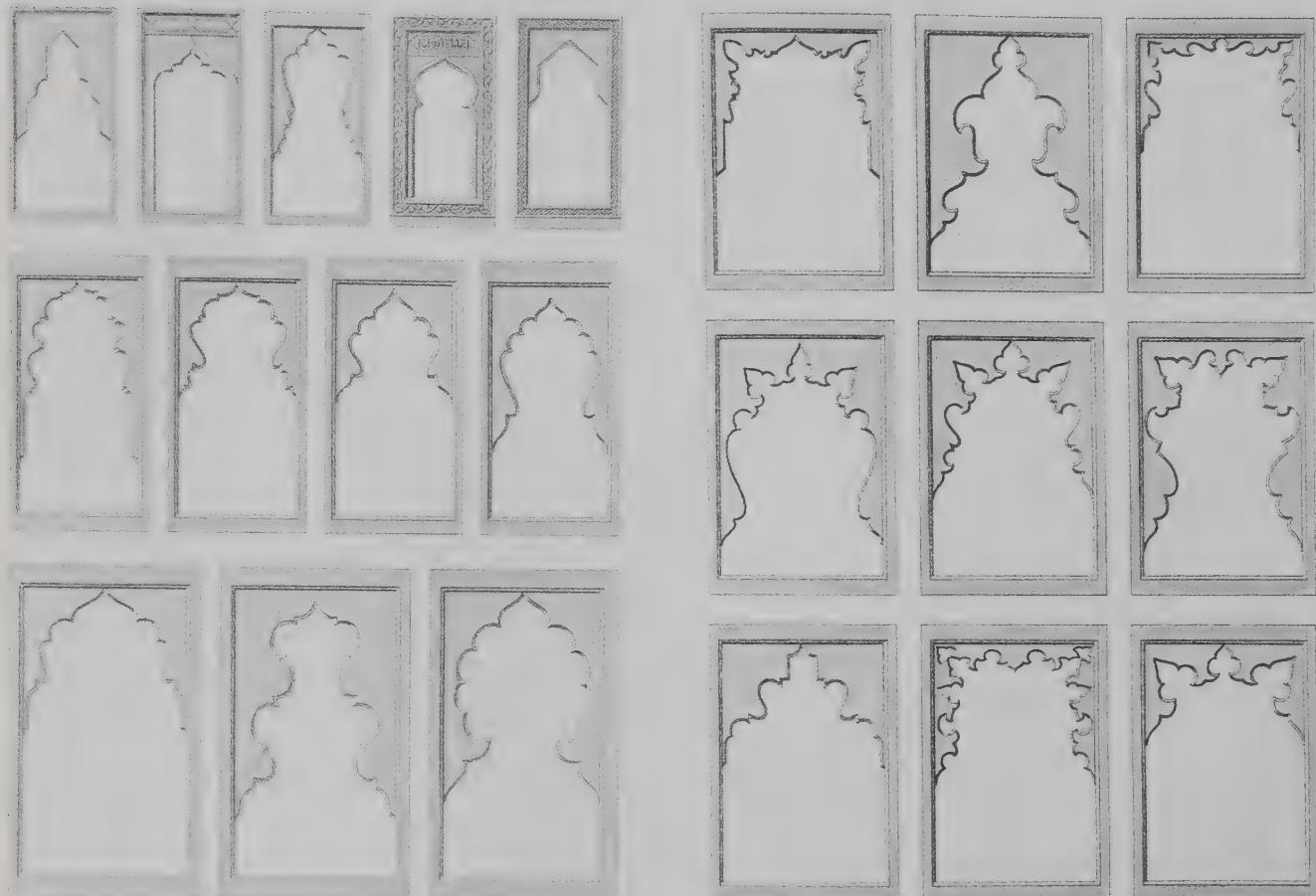


XIV Capitals

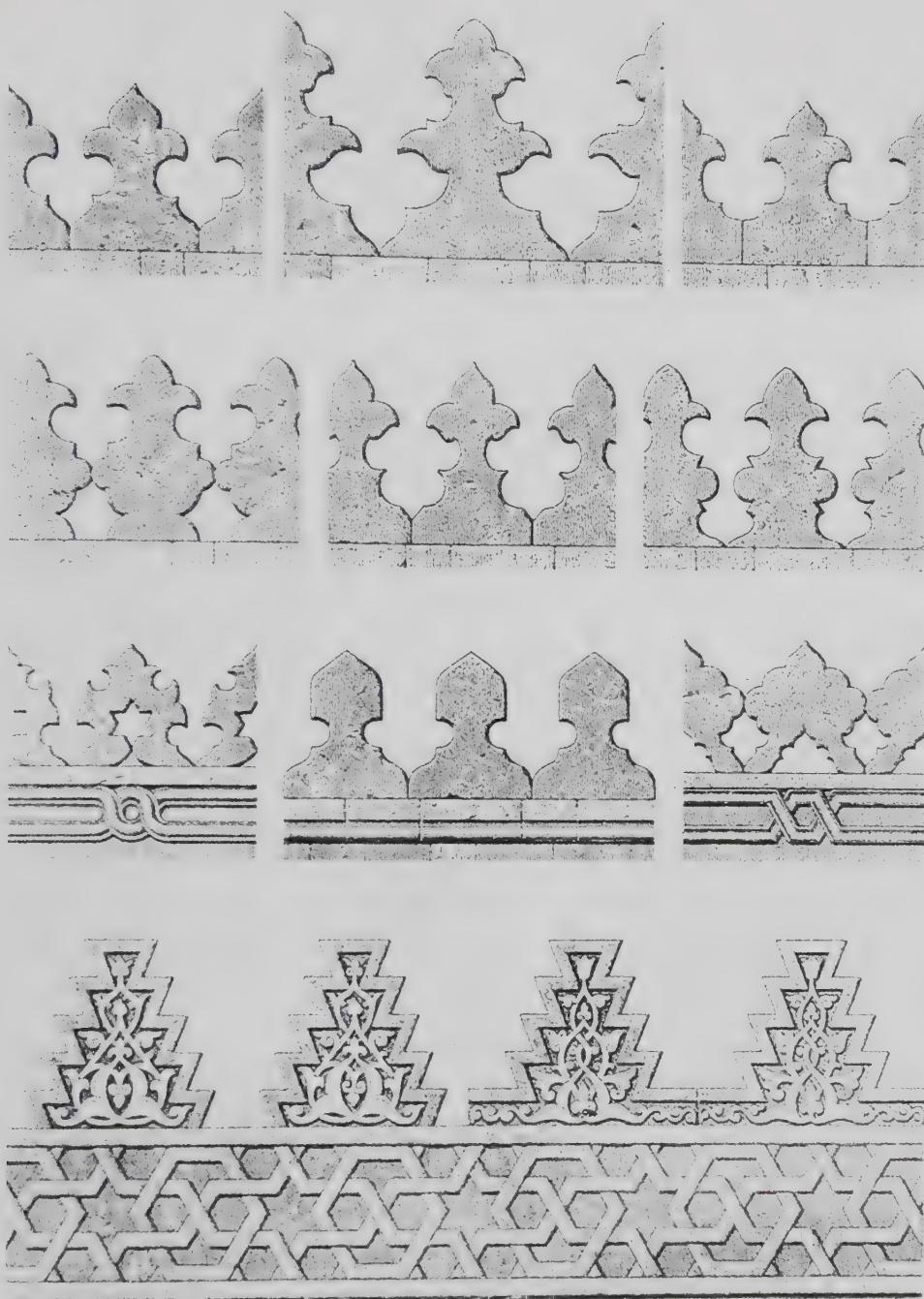
Medieval Cairo architecture displays an amalgam of recycled Egyptian, Greek, and Roman materials. Prisse elaborates on the felicitous efforts of artisans as seen in a mosque in Damietta: it boasts a capital (top) with an inverted bell-shape at its base by overlapping leaves and surmounted by an abacus, whose arms are supported by palmettes.

Prisse depicted a wide array of stone lancet arches, some of which display characteristically Eastern single keystones at the peak of the arch. Others, following a more Western style, lack a keystone proper: the summit of the arch is a vertical point that separates the voussoirs of one demi-arch from those of the one opposite.

Prisse included these arches as an insight into the subtle yet fundamental difference between lancet arches of the East and West. He asserts that the lancet arch, employed since antiquity in Egypt solely for its decorative possibilities, did not—unlike in Western architectural traditions—lead to further developments in construction techniques.



XV & XVI. Comparative arches



XVII. Comparative merlons

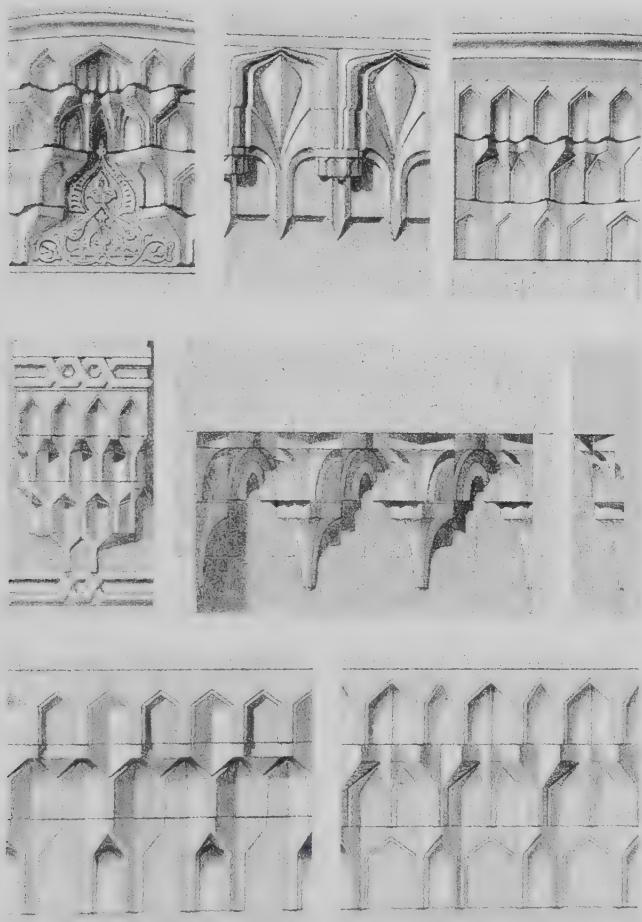
Prisse included various merlons that seemingly adhere to no set shape. Whether constructed in the shape of trefoils, spearheads or fleurs-de-lis, the merlons' form depended on materials—stone or wood. The merlons along the bottom of the page, taken from Qalawaun's mosque, feature tooth shapes adorned with arabesques that stand out in relief.

Art historians, continually trying to sort architectural development into a strict chronological framework, often overlook the possibility that advances can be made separately, even simultaneously in different areas. Prisse excitedly asserts that this structure predates the work of Brunelleschi (1420) and attributes to the Arabs first use of lanterns to form cupolas.

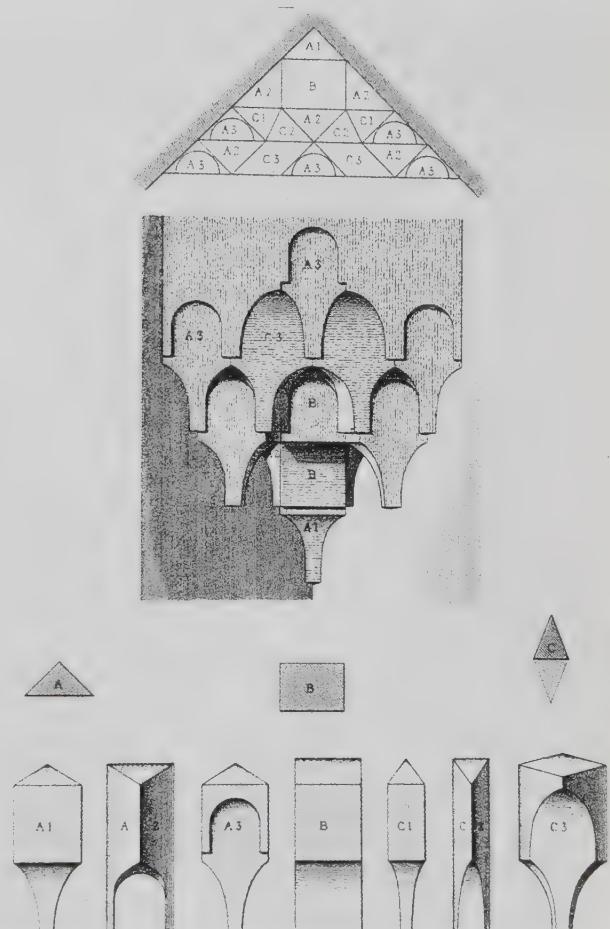


XVIII. Tomb complex of Abdallah al-Manufi

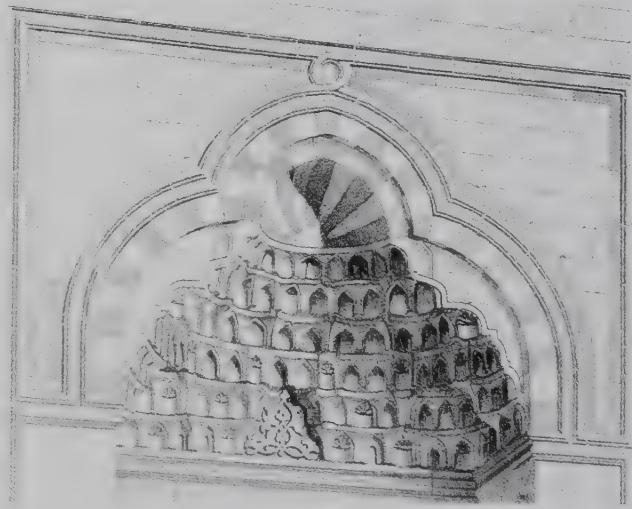
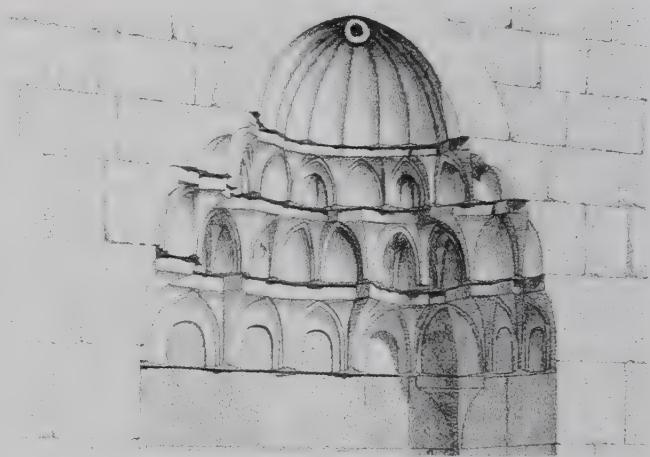
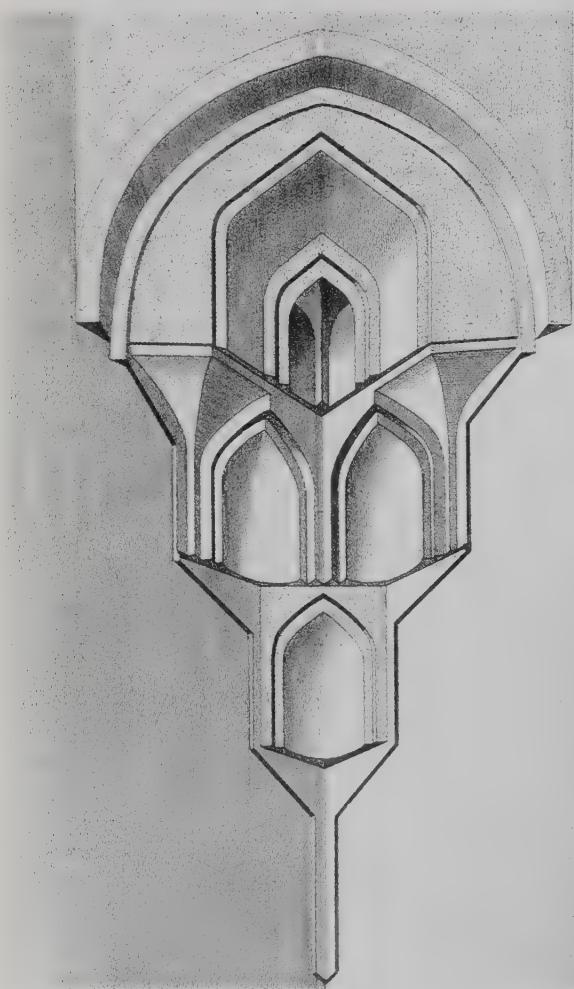
A muqamas, a mason's technical term, is composed of a series of niches embedded within a frame, such as a pendentive or squinch. Prisse parallels the design with a sliced and pitted watermelon; the popular metaphor today is the honeycomb. The term used in European sources, stalactites, is only valid in cases where the image of dripping stone formations is evoked. Owen Jones' analytical eye dissects the muqamas. Prisse notes how the structure as a whole can be "easily reduced to a mathematical construction ... composed of many prisms of plaster held together on their lateral faces by means of a very fine cement." He distinguishes the vertical prisms: the right triangle as (a), the parallelogram (b), and the isosceles triangle (c).



(Left) XIX. Comparative muqarnases (stalactites); (right) XXII. Study of pendentives, by Owen Jones

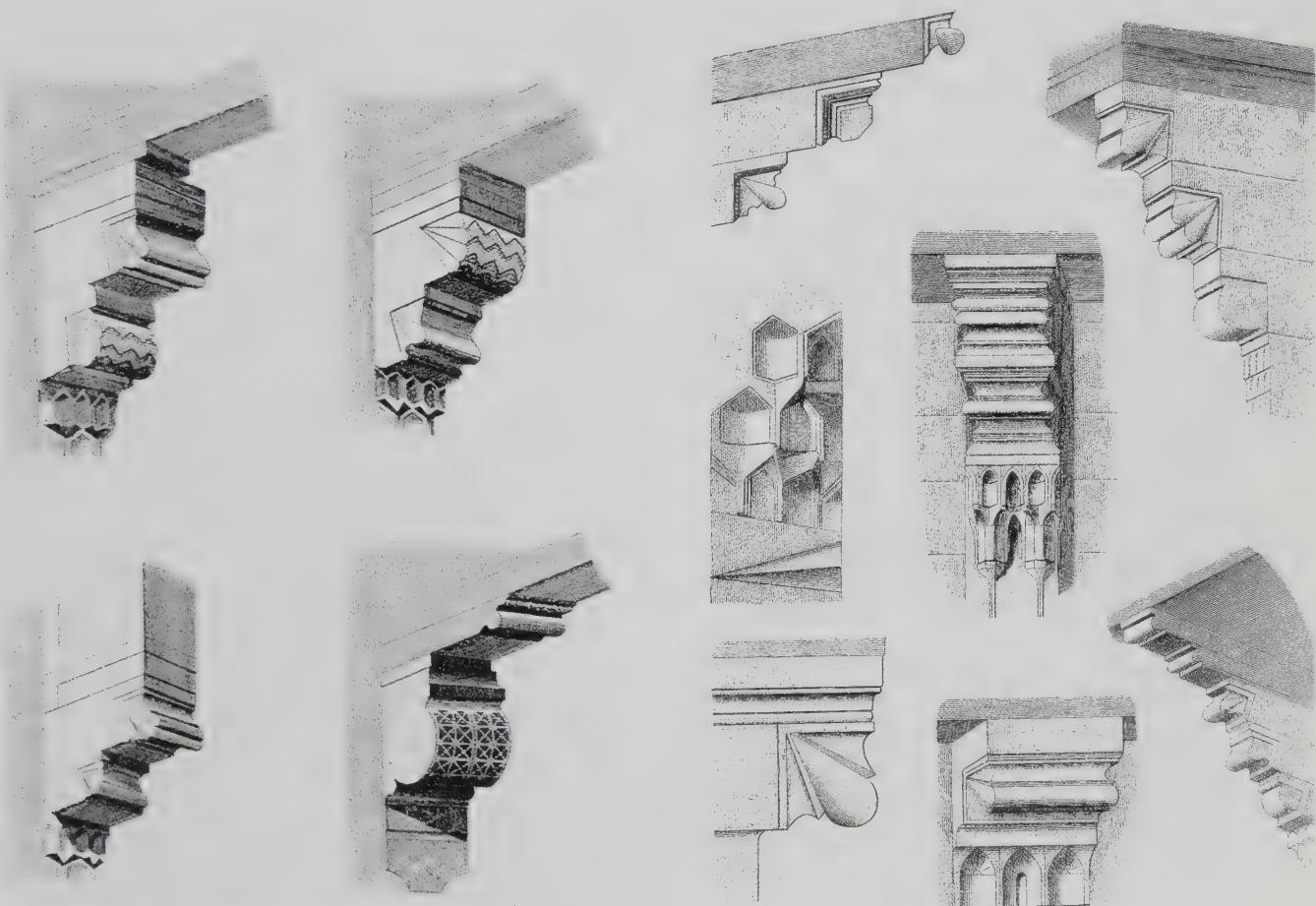


The muqamas, an architectural composition of niche-like quarter-domes closely connected with the transition zone, was used to mask the awkwardness of the area between the cubic base and the domical section of the building. Units of the muqamas are sometimes repeated and multiplied on a smaller scale to form the squinch. The muqamas spread in the 11th century throughout the Islamic world, becoming, like the arabesque and inscriptive bands, a characteristic feature of architecture from Egypt to Central Asia. Prisse refers to Diez, who suggested this design element was not an individual invention but something rooted in Islamic culture and mentality.



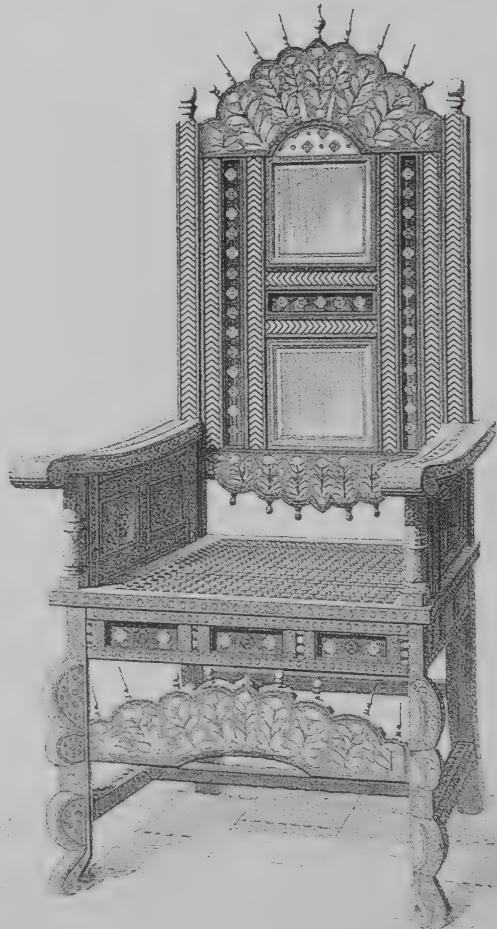
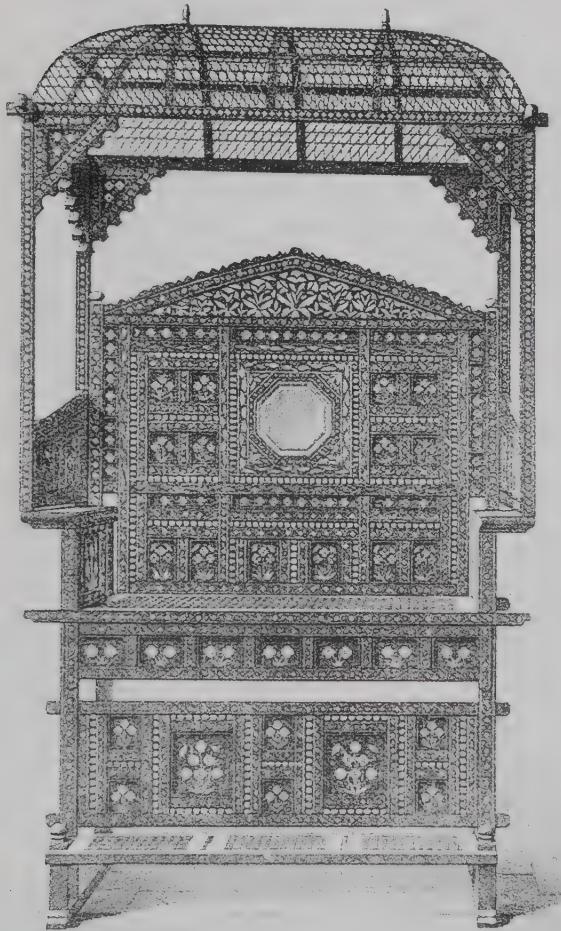
XX. Pendentives & XXI. Pendentives: crowning the doors

A corbel, a large external stone that protrudes a greater distance than its height, was used to ease the weight on a beam or to support the transverse rib of a vault. Sculpted in a variety of ways, corbels were often at the base of a capital or positioned under a mashrabiya when it formed part of a stone house; in such cases, the device was included in architectural plans. According to Prisse, the pendentive, originally intended to fill a portion of the vault between the dome, was adapted to serve a functional and aesthetic role in cubical structures requiring support. He seemingly credits Islamic architectural traditions with developing this device.



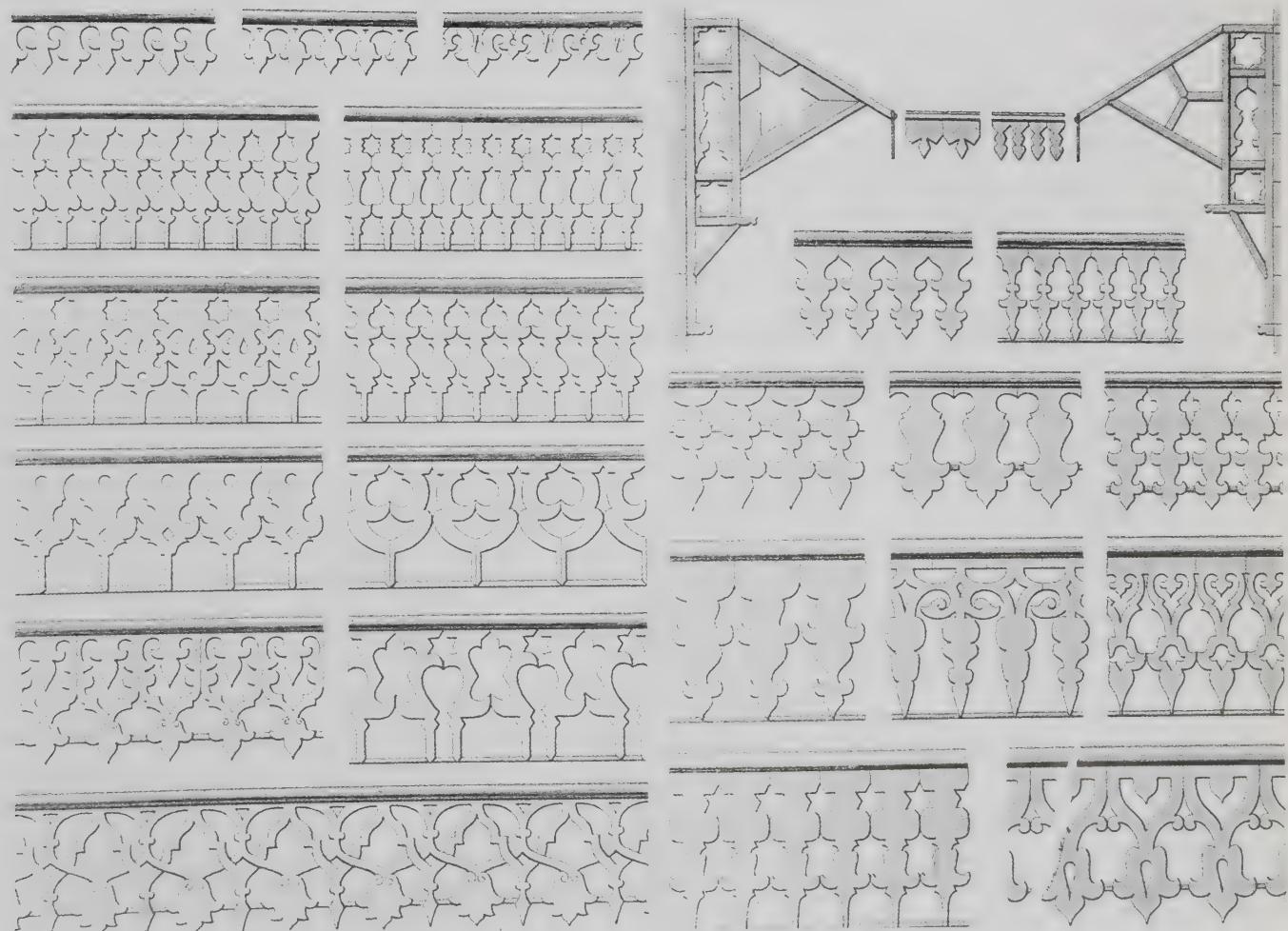
(Left) XXIII. Comparative corbels; (right) XXIV. Comparative corbeling

The kursi al-imma played a significant role, according Prisse, in prevailing matrimonial ritual. It accompanied the bride to her conjugal residence, where it was placed beside the bed to hold the clothing she removed at night. It was a unique and meaningful piece of indoor furniture, as people for the most part sat on divans and carpets. Although Prisse makes it clear that wood was an imported medium in Egypt, he asserts that this "Indian armchair... is of Arab construction. If it was not built by guilds of Arab workers, there is no doubt that it is the work of a Muslim artist of India." He notes that the chair would have been used in the garden.



(Left) XXV. Kursi al-imma; (right) XXVI. Indian armchair

Wood cut into the shape of arabesques was a popular form of ornamentation. According to Prisse it was transmitted during the medieval period from Arabs to Europeans, who have since then frequently employed this decorative method in their architecture. Prisse asserts that wood lambrequins offer more originality and flexibility than gypsum arabesques. These cut wood pieces would have been used to border overhanging roofs or the balustrades of terraces. They were employed to mask awkward or abrupt transitions wherever it was not possible to use stone, bronze, or plaster.



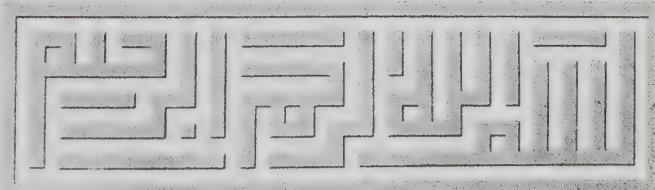
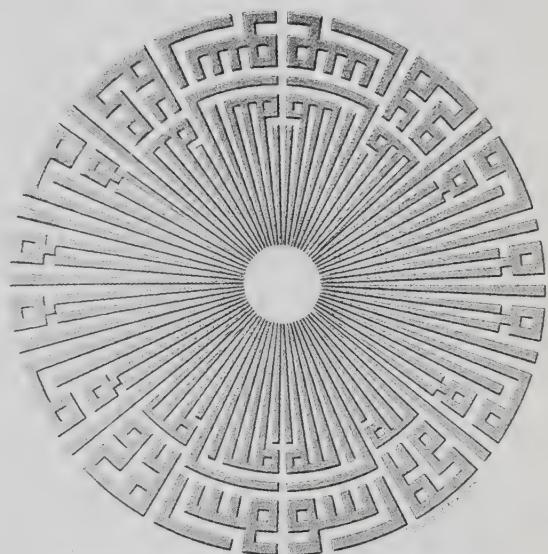
XXVII & XXVIII. Comparative lambrequins

Prisse includes this rare example of an Arab statue commissioned by Fatimid caliph al-Hakim Bi-'amr-illah in the 11th century then later carried to Italy by the Crusaders. It stands 1.77m and spans 1.16m. Its hybrid form, eagle and lion, are attributes of the supreme gods of Babylon and Nineveh, idols worshiped in Mecca and Yemen in pre-Islamic times.



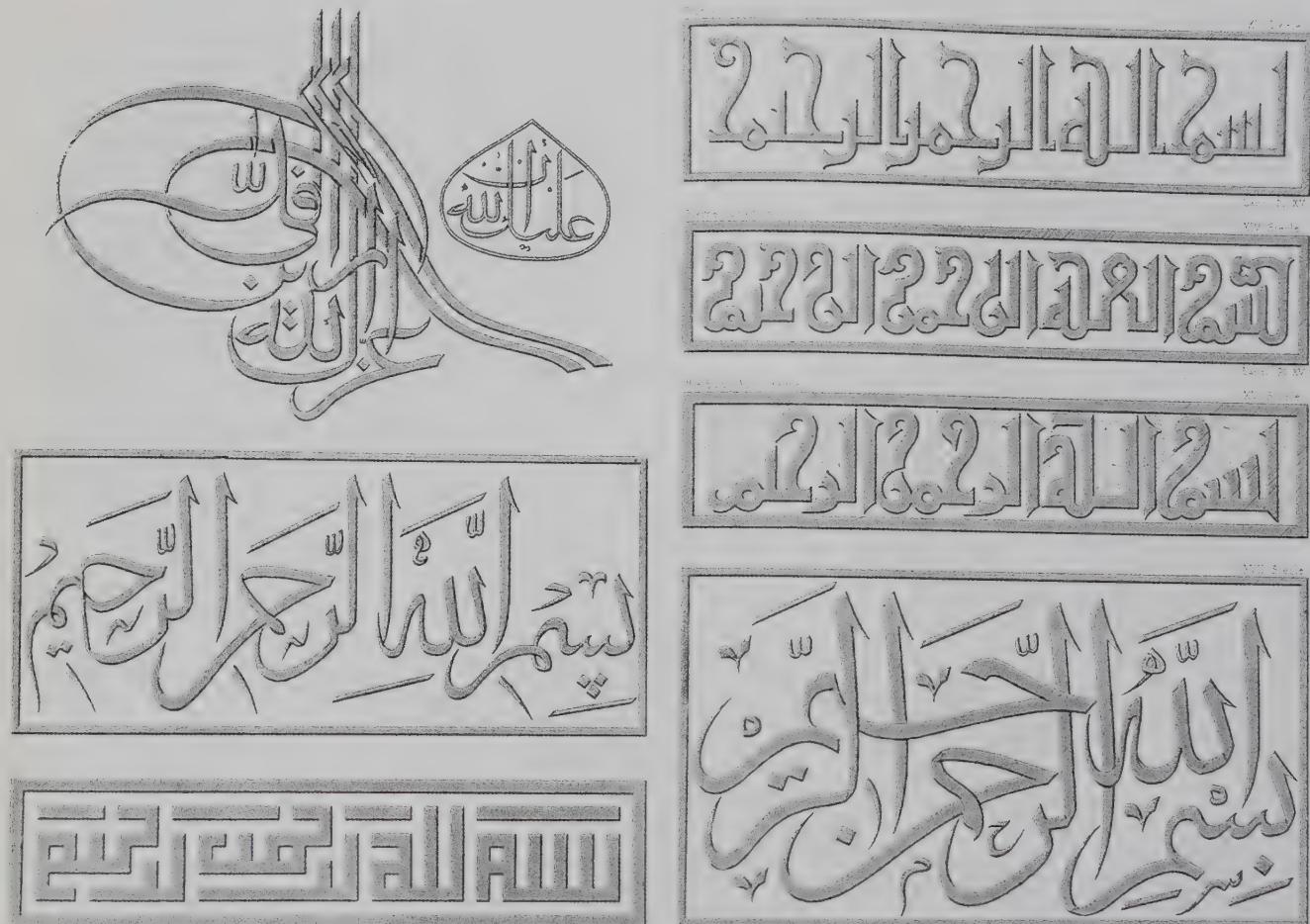
XXIX. Griffin of Pisa

Kufic writing, a derivative of the equally angular Syriac script, was used in the earliest stages of Islam. Kufic, initially associated with the copying of Qurans, was reserved for that purpose and architectural decorations. The role of writing in the development of Islamic architecture was critical as it afforded structures a new system of symbols. A significant characteristic of calligraphic scripts is their adaptability. Shapes and sizes can be compressed and given a rounded form to fit on the face of a circular coin or stretched out and given an angular form to follow the surface of a rectangular page. The script itself can absorb a variety of motifs, thus further blurring the distinction between it and the decoration.

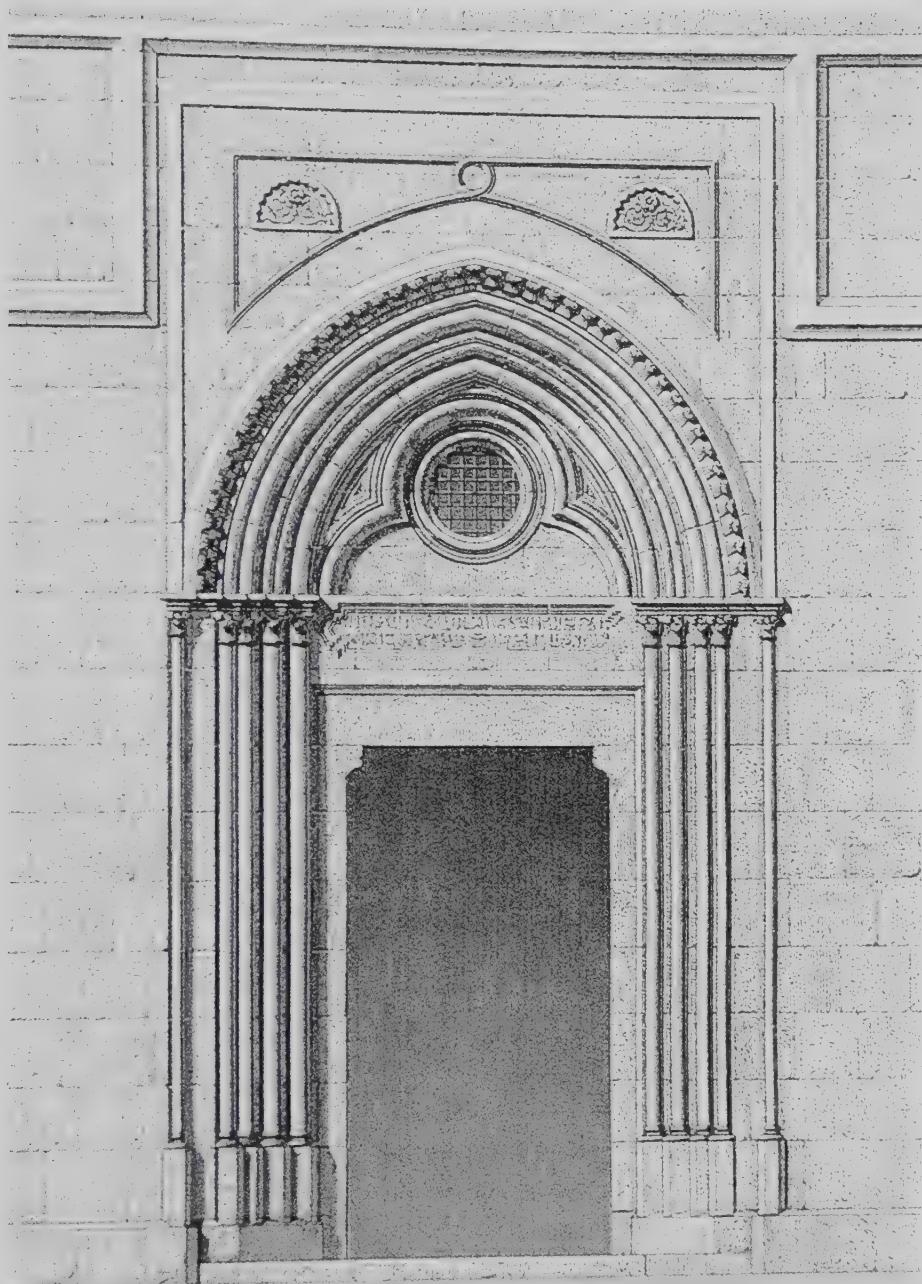


XXX & XXXI. Comparative writing of various periods: Kufic & rectangular Kufic

Thuluth (which literally means 'one third' and derives its name from the principle that a third of each letter should slope) is a dynamic and ornamental script with well-formed letters that emphasize vertical and horizontal movements, which are easily contrasted with the masculine appearance and straight lines of the Kufic below. Individual scripts can be endlessly modified or adapted to all kinds of surfaces, from parchment to paper to stone and metal. By twisting, braiding, and ornamenting the ends of stems of certain letters, such as alif and lam, a whole range of decorative features are added to the script. Although modified and lightened, the Kufic still provides contrast for the Thuluth, which dances on the page.



XXXII & XXXIII. Comparative writing of various periods: Kufic & Thuluth



XXXIV. Door: Mosque of Malik al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawaun

This door, part of a complex begun by Kitbugha, a Mongol who had been Qalawaun's Mamluke and had usurped the throne from al-Nasir Muhammad, was appropriated and completed by al-Nasir when he regained control of the throne in 1299. The gate, unlike the very Iranized stucco carved interior, preserved more of the structure's original Gothic-like demeanor.

Architecture

1. Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun, interior of the maqsura, 9th century.
2. Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun, arcade & interior windows, 9th century.
3. Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun, details, 9th century.
4. Al-Azhar mosque, main courtyard, 10th-18th centuries.
5. Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i, details, elevation, & plan, 12th century.
6. Bab al-Azab, main gate of the Citadel, 18th century.
7. Entrance to the palace of Sultan Baybars, 13th century.
8. Al-Zahir mosque, plan, elevation, & details, 13th century.
9. Tekiyat al-Shaykh Hasan Sadaqa, 16th century.
10. Baybarsiya mosque, minaret, 14th century.
11. Mosque of Sultan Hasan, portal, 14th century.
12. Door of a house on Sha'arawi Street, 14th century.
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Emile Prisse d'Avennes (1807-79), a colossal figure in Egyptian studies, is also the author of *Atlas of Egyptian Art*, the *Oriental Album*, as well as dozens of articles and reports on a variety of subjects. He was whimsical, uncompromising, disdainful of etiquette, a remarkable scholar, an able draftsman, determined to publish Egypt's legacy according to his strict standards.

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